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THE MAD HUSSARS; or, The O's and the Macs.

A STORY OF FOUR IRISH SOLDIERS OF FORTUNE.

BY CAPTAIN FRED. WHITTAKER.

AUTHOR OF "NEMO, KING OF THE TRAMPS," "RED RUDIGER," "THE RUSSIAN SPY," "THE RED RAJAH," "THE IRISH CAPTAIN," "THE MAN IN RED," "DEATH'S HEAD CUIRASSIERS," "PHANTOM KNIGHTS," ETC., ETC.



THE TWO HUSSARS, WITH A WILD IRISH YELL, LEAPED THE PARAPET OF THE BRIDGE, SIDE BY SIDE, AND WENT DOWN INTO THE DARK WATERS OF THE SPREE WITH A LOUD SPLASH.

The Mad Hussars;

OR,
The O's and the Macs.

A Story of Four Irish Soldiers
of Fortune.

BY CAPT. FRED. WHITTAKER,
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CHAPTER I.

THE LOOST EN ROOST.

MYNHEER BLOCK sat in his favorite arm-chair at the door of the "Loost en Roost," in the same spot where he had sat daily for forty-five years of tavern-keeping, smoking his wonderful painted pipe, and listening to the frogs in the canal, as they performed a symphony in "B flat."

That is to say, Mynheer Block had been told by the organist of the kirke of the village of Boomfelt that frogs invariably sung their compositions in the key of "B flat," and it had become a matter of religious belief with him that they did so. For the organist of the kirke was also a Doctor of Music, with a parchment diploma thirty inches square; and if such a man were not competent to decide on the key in which a frog symphony was performed, where could certainty be found in this world?

Mynheer Block was never weary of listening to the frogs on a summer day, in the heat of the afternoon. He had done this so long that he could detect the voices of individuals, and announce that "such an one has a fine tenor," or, "there is a new bass to-day, and he occasionally sings out of tune."

These sort of things he said to himself, when people supposed he was asleep or muttering to his painted pipe, which, after the frog symphonies, was the pride and pet of his declining years.

To see Mynheer Block sitting there in his huge wicker arm-chair, his ample paunch forming a support for the "water sack" of his grand painted pipe, his hands crossed in placid contentment over his hemisphere of fat, his round rosy face and dull blue eyes as void of expression as the countenance of one of the canal choristers, to whom he had so long listened without becoming tired, was to become convinced that Mynheer was a true Dutchman, born and bred.

And so he was, and an innkeeper at that, who for twenty out of his forty-five years of business, had never risen from his chair to serve a guest, though guests were plenty enough on market days.

Mynheer Block loved his ease, and, like a true Dutchman, he held on to it when he had it, and grew richer year by year, on account of wanting so little.

He was quite satisfied with frog cantatas for amusement in summer, while in the winter he listened, with equal placidity, to the nasal tones of the tea-kettle on the hob of the open fireplace—for, even in Holland, stoves were then unknown.

From all which facts it may be inferred that Mynheer Block slept a good deal.

So he did.

But on the afternoon when we come upon him, Mynheer Block was not asleep.

He was simply happy; for his dear friend, Captain Sloggerboom, of the good ship Frow Dam, had brought him some new Turkish tobacco the day before, and Mynheer had emptied several ounces into the capacious bowl of his painted pipe which his niece Karin had lighted for him after his dinner; and he was sitting there, in the wicker chair, saying to himself, as the smoke curled up:

"Well, that's good—yes—that's very good—very good indeed—in fact, excellent. I can have a long smoke to-day."

Then he raised his dull eyes and looked at the same prospect he had beheld daily for sixty-five years, with as much simple pleasure as ever.

Truly there was not much to see, for one who had been in other lands.

There was the Loost en Roost, with its high gable end, and the date "1568" in big iron letters on its brick front; a row of pollard willows along the bank of the canal before the house, and on the other side a green meadow, flat as a billiard table. Beyond that another line of willows announced another canal; a few windmills rose here and there on the horizon, and that was all.

All but a faint smoky cloud in the pale sky to the northeast, where lay the city of Rotterdam, about ten miles off. Mynheer Block sat always so that he could see the road along the canal that led from Swarthook to Boomfelt, and thence to Rotterdam. He was a good landlord in spite of his lethargic nature, and his eyes were always open for a traveler, for the Loost en Roost took the cream of the canal custom, as the only inn to be found at Boomfelt.

Mynheer smoked his pipe, the frogs began to sing, and Block said to himself:

"They are in good voice to-day. I almost wish it were not time for the drag-boat to come. It always stops them."

The drag-boat passed the Loost en Roost every second day regularly at four in the afternoon, till the canals froze up, and it stopped there for half an hour, during which Karin and Peter had to run about a good deal to wait on the guests, while Block gave orders.

"There is a foot-traveler coming on the road," he continued to himself. "He will want only some bread and cheese, and the profits are small on that; so let him go on to Swarthook. I don't want to stir for two or three copper groschen."

And Mynheer Block gazed contemplatively at the painted bowl of his pipe, and pretended not to notice the traveler who was coming toward the Loost en Roost from Rotterdam on foot, while people of respectability traveled on the drag-boat, or occasionally on horseback.

The pedestrian, however, came on in a manner that convinced Mynheer Block he did not intend to be ignored, and was soon close enough to be recognized as a foreigner by the cut of his clothes. Moreover, he was, as evidently, a soldier by profession or a noble by birth, for he wore a sword, though he walked instead of riding.

Mynheer Block's dull eyes opened a little in surprise as he looked at the stranger, for he had rarely seen a handsomer youth, tall and slender in figure, with curling brown hair, undignified by powder, frank blue eyes, a military mustache and regular aristocratic features. The stranger's dress, too, was by no means that of a poor man, for he had a green velvet coat with considerable gold lace on it, and his leggings for walking were of fine buckskin, with silver buttons. To be sure, he carried a small knapsack, but that was obviously a mere convenience, for the landlord could see that it contained no clothing but, instead, one or two books and some drawing materials.

"An artist," he said to himself. "But what is he doing with a sword?" I don't want him. These foreign artists have no money."

So Mynheer Block gazed steadfastly at the bowl of his pipe and half closed his eyes, in order that the stranger might think him asleep and pass on.

But the stranger had no such intention, for he came swinging along at a brisk pace, singing in some foreign language, a lively rollicking air, so different from the droning chorus of the frogs that Mynheer quivered in all his fat at the noisy interrupter of his peace, whose song was pitched in "C sharp," and calculated to put the frogs out of harmony.

As he ended the refrain, "Lillibullero, bul-l'en a la" with a high note that fairly frightened Block, he came up to the worthy innkeeper, and dealt him a sounding smack on the shoulder, knocking some hot ashes out of the china pipe, in the start that he elicited from Mynheer, as he cried:

"Come, wake up, old sluggard! Is this the way you keep house? Hurry your legs and get me some dinner, for I'm hungry. Do you hear me?"

And down came a second slap, with such force that Block perceived the stranger to be as strong as a horse, in spite of his seemingly slender figure.

The worthy landlord looked up reproachfully, observing in a mournful way:

"Don't ruin my digestion, friend. It is bad for the humors of the body to be disturbed after dinner. What do you want?"

"Want? Whatever you've got. The best in your sleepy old castle. Wine, chickens, anything and everything, as long as you bring it quick."

Mynheer Block turned his head and called out in a wheezy voice:

"Karin! Karin! come here."

"Coming, uncle X in," cried a voice from the house, and the young stranger smiled with great apparent pleasure, as a plump little Dutch maiden came out, asking:

"What is it, uncle?"

"This young man wants dinner, Karin. Let him have as much as he can pay for," said Block in his usual stolid fashion, whereat the stranger burst into a laugh, and dealt him another resounding smack, crying:

"Sensible as ever. No slap can tame the thirst for gold; ha, landlord! Come, my pretty little maiden, let us explore and investigate, for I'm hungry as a wolf."

And with that, he was beside her in another moment, had caught her round the waist and kissed her, before the little maid, who was nearly as slow of apprehension as her phlegmatic uncle, knew what he meant, when she rewarded him with a sounding box on the ear, as she broke away into the house, not by any means displeased, however, if one could judge from the giggle that she could not repress as she fled.

As for Mynheer Block he sat, flabby and nerveless, unable to stir from his chair for two reasons:

First, he was too fat; second, he was too much amazed. In forty-five years of tavern-keeping he had never seen a foot-traveler otherwise than

humble and apologetic; while, if a French nobleman occasionally kissed the girls round the Loost en Roost it was only at parting, and accompanied by a gold piece as a compliment.

But here was a noisy young man, who slapped him on the back in the rudest of ways, and hugged Karin openly, before he had spent a penny in the house.

Positively Mynheer Block trembled in his fat, and it was in the faintest of voices that he wheezed out:

"Peter! Peter Sloggerboom! come here."

"I come," answered another voice, and Peter Sloggerboom, man of all work at the Loost en Roost, and the youngest son of the great Captain Dykink Sloggerboom, who had brought Block his tobacco, came rolling round the corner.

Peter was nineteen years of age: just five feet two in perpendicular height; but he weighed two hundred and fifty pounds already, and his round face showed that he enjoyed good living above all things.

"What is it, baas?" asked Peter.

"Peter," wheezed Block, "come here."

"I come," was the obedient answer, and Peter rolled near his master, and stood staring at him like a fish, unwinking.

"Peter," whispered Mynheer, "there is a man in the house, wants dinner; and he has followed my niece, Karin, to the kitchen. He is a foreigner and may be a murderer. Go and protect Karin. If he is rude to her, put him out of the kitchen."

Peter nodded and waddled away. He was well known through Boomfelt, as being, spite of his fat, the strongest young man in that part of the country, and he had always proved useful at the Loost en Roost, to put out objectionable people, if, as rarely happened, they were there.

Moreover, Peter, in the depths of his easy-loving soul, had visions of a day when old Block would be gathered to his fathers, and he, Peter, would marry Karin and be lord of the Loost en Roost; so it was with more alacrity than common, that he waddled into the house and finally into the kitchen, where he stood at the door, spell bound, watching the scene.

Karin was evidently in no danger. On the contrary, she seemed to be perfectly well satisfied with her position and companion; for she was broiling a duck over the fire, and chattering merrily away to the handsome stranger, who was sitting with his feet up on the kitchen table, watching her.

The stranger looked up at Peter with a smile, asking:

"Well, friend, what's the matter with thee?"

Peter looked at him stolidly.

"The matter is that you must go out of this kitchen, for we have a guests' room."

"I don't want a guests' room. This is ten times more picturesque. See. Stand just as you are, and I'll take your picture."

"Ay, stand as thou art, Peter," chimed in Karin. "The gentleman has promised to take mine too, and we'll all be famous. Now, Mynheer Moritz, the duck will be ready in a minute. Take down your feet, and I'll spread the cloth."

Peter saw that there was no decent excuse for assaulting the stranger, though he felt a twinge of jealousy agitating his sluggish nature; so he slowly wandered off to the little stable behind the Loost en Roost, where his duties usually lay, when he was roused from a fit of stolid abstraction by a shrill whistle, and spied a horseman coming along the bank of the canal from the direction of Rotterdam.

This horseman rode an animal very rarely seen in Holland, a slender, symmetrical blood horse; carried pistols at his saddle-bow, wore a blue coat, three-cornered laced hat, and a sword at his side; all marks of a military man, looking for service.

Peter rolled to the front of the house and the stranger leaped off his horse by the side of Mynheer Block, whom he saluted, as had his predecessor, with a rollicking slap on the shoulder and the shout:

"House! house! Are you all asleep here?"

Mynheer Block, to tell the truth, had been asleep for several minutes. The perturbation of his mild spirits, caused by the first stranger, had subsided into peace under the soothing influence of the frog symphony, and he was dreaming about the drag-boat coming in, when he was shocked into consciousness by the slap, and looked up, to behold a tall, bony young man, with fierce brown eyes, red hair gathered into a cue, and a fiery-red mustache waxed up to a point.

And this young man was crying:

"Get up, you lazy old man! Is this the way you wait on your guests? I want dinner and a bottle of wine at once. Here, hostler, take my horse, and walk him cool before you feed him. Now, landlord, dinner, dinner! I'm in a hurry and hungry."

Old Block almost dropped his pipe. He was used to being treated with deference; and here, for the second time, he was being ridden over by a stranger rough-shod.

He was so much demoralized that he could only call out:

"Karin! Karin!"

But Karin did not come, being at the moment

employed in waiting on the handsome stranger inside, so that the red-haired cavalier immediately grew impatient, and roared:

"Karin! Karin! Who the devil are you, and where have you gone to? Hollo! Karin! Karin!"

And this time Karin, who, as a matter of fact, was listening to a story the handsome stranger was telling her, jumped up in a fright, crying:

"More guests coming! Oh gracious, Mynheer Moritz, my hair's all out of order."

And ran out to her uncle crying:

"Here I am, uncle Yan. What is it?"

And the minute the red-haired man saw her his, fierce face softened, and he burst into a laugh as he cried out:

"By all the gods of war, my pretty maiden, I've not seen such a face in Holland. And thou art Karin? Nay then, I must indeed—"

And with even more suddenness than the blonde young man had done, he also caught Karin around the waist and imprinted a rousing smack on her cheek, crying out:

"Maurice McMahon salutes thee, and wants dinner and a bottle of wine, quick!"

And this time Karin was too much amazed and frightened to give her retaliatory slap; so she uttered a scream of real or affected terror, and ran into the house, calling out:

"Mynheer Moritz! Mynheer Moritz! Here is a mad gentleman outside. Save me!"

"Save you!" echoed the blonde gentleman, looking lazily up. "Why, who's bursting you?"

"Oh, a great, ugly, red-headed man tried to kiss me," panted Karin, looking injured, "and I'm afraid he's coming after me."

"The devil he is!"

In a moment the blonde young man was on his feet, and had picked up the sword he had but a little while ago laid on the table.

"Do you want me to kill him for you?" he asked, composedly; "or shall I only teach him a little manners?"

"Oh, anything you like," cried Karin, trembling. "Drive him away, he frightens me."

"I'll take pleasure in doing so," returned the blonde stranger; "and if I don't teach him a lesson in politeness, my name's not Maurice McMorris."

And so saying, he strode out of the kitchen to the green turf in front, and almost ran against the red-headed cavalier, who was just coming in, and who stopped short and recoiled with a fierce frown, ejaculating:

"Who the devil are you, sir?"

"What the devil's that to you, sir?" retorted the blonde gentleman, as haughtily. "Who are you, sir? What's your name?"

"I don't give my name to every one that asks for it," returned the red-headed cavalier, with a sneer. "Out of the way, sir. I'm going into the tavern!"

"You can't go in, sir," retorted the man in the green velvet coat.

"Why not, sir?"

"Because I've taken it myself, sir, and you've been trying to insult my little girl, sir. Do you hear, sir? I hold the passage, sir."

And so saying, the gentleman in green drew his sword, and squared himself before the man in blue, who on his part laughed aloud, whipped out his rapier, and shouted:

"Hurroo! Haven't had a fight since I came to this country! Hurroo! Erin go Bragh!"

And in another moment these two young men, who had never seen each other before, were thrusting and parrying with a strength and lightning rapidity neither had expected to find in the other, while Mynheer Block was so utterly astounded that he was managed to stagger up from his chair, wheezing out:

"Peter! Peter! Mein Gott! they are all mad as the lunatics! Where did they come from?"

But nobody heeded his cries; for the two young men kept on fighting all round the green plot; till the red-headed man tumbled over Block without seeing him and fell on his back, when the blonde man waved his sword in the air, shouting out, as he saw that the other had lost his sword:

"McMorris forever! Hurroo!"

And Maurice McMahon, who was on his back, sat up and asked in English:

"Is your name McMorris? Holy fathers!"

CHAPTER II.

THE FOUR MAURICES.

MYNHEER BLOCK had fallen flat on his back, and lay kicking and groaning, with McMahon beside him, when the Irishman asked this question, and Maurice McMorris answered with surprise, in English:

"And of course it is, and who are you, anyway? I've beat ye fair, haven't I?"

"No, by the powers!" cried McMahon, "ye haven't beat me fair, and ye know it. Didn't I trip over this ould spaldeen, bad luck to him? Ye've got the luck of it, Mr. McMorris, and I'm not denying ye can take advantage of it; but Maurice McMahon will die before he'll admit ye did it fair."

The blonde young man listened attentively, and answered him:

"If ye deny it, take up your sword again. I'll not be taking advantage of a countryman in distress. Is your name McMahon?"

"Surely, and I'm not ashamed of it," replied McMahon, rising and looking for his sword, which had flown out of his hand when he tumbled over Mynheer Block. "Where the devil's the sword, anyway, at all?"

Here Peter Sloggerboom, who had been standing by, aghast at the sight of naked steel, to which he was unaccustomed, cried out:

"The police will take us all up if we don't stop this, gentlemen. What are you seeking?"

He saw McMahon hunting about, and did not understand English.

"My sword, you fool. Where is it?" asked the red-headed Irishman, angrily.

"Your sword? Why there it is, under master."

And sure enough, in the fall, the sword had run through Mynheer Block's coat, and he had fallen on the handle, driving the point deep down into the soft ground, and pinning the unfortunate innkeeper to the earth.

Maurice McMorris burst out laughing.

"You're beaten. Don't ye see you're beaten, Mr. McMahon? I could kill ye ten times over, before ye could get that sword."

McMahon scratched his head and grinned.

"By the powers, it's a nate little trick ye served me, McMorris. And where d'ye come from at home?"

"From Galway," answered the man in green with a slight sigh, "and it's never I'll see it again, I'm thinking."

The intelligence seemed to displease Mr. McMahon, for he answered stiffly:

"I'm from Tipperary, sir, and as soon as I get me sword out, I'll run ye through the body, so I will."

And without more ado, he rushed over to the fallen innkeeper, and began to tug away at his rotund body, to extricate the sword from its singular position.

But his efforts would have been all in vain had not Peter Sloggerboom come to his help, when their combined strength dragged the old mynheer out of his coat and Maurice McMahon managed to pull up the sword from the ground, only to find it snapped in half and useless.

Then McMorris burst out laughing again as he cried to his compatriot:

"Surely the fates are against us in this, Mr. McMahon. Ye can't fight any more."

"And I say I can," cried McMahon fiercely; "if ye're a true son of old Erin, ye'll break your sword as short as mine, and we'll fight it out fairly without advantage. A Connaught man and a Tip can't live till one's hate the other. Break your sword and fight me fair."

Maurice McMorris immediately said:

"With the greatest pleasure in life, if ye insist. But wouldn't it be better for ye to get another sword? I don't want to break mine; for, by the powers, I'll not have money to buy me another in a hurry."

McMahon's face immediately cleared up.

"My dear boy, s'y no more. I'll share my purse with ye. Surely I've enough for both; but fight ye must, if that fat spaldeen there will keep out of the way."

And with that he turned round on the landlord and Peter, who stood staring and listening in vain to the foreign tongue, and went on in Dutch:

"Get into the house, you and your hostler, for we've a little business to settle, this gentleman and myself."

Mynheer Block stared like a fish.

"Leave my place!" he gasped. "Leave my chair, where I've sat for forty-five years! You are lunatics! Go away, I tell you."

Maurice McMahon turned round.

"Mr. McMorris," he said politely in English, "my sword has no point. Will ye kindly lend me your own to prod this ould thief, till he gets into the house."

McMorris laughed.

"No need of that. Leave it to me."

Then he went up to Karin, and whispered:

"Take your uncle into the house, while I teach this fellow manners, or we shall hurt the old man. Tell Peter to pull him in."

Karin, who had been crying and trembling, looked up at him pitifully.

"Oh, mynheer, don't fight any more. He is a madman. He will kill you."

"Do as I tell ye. I'll take care of myself," he answered lightly. "You don't understand the men of my nation. We're never so happy as when we're fighting, except when we're making love. Take in your uncle, if you love me, Karin."

Karin blushed and smiled through her tears, as she went to Peter and whispered:

"Take my uncle in. Carry him, if he won't walk. Let them fight alone."

Peter nodded. He had been staring stolidly at the whole proceeding, as if he had not the slightest interest in it; but Karin knew she could control him with a look, for Peter had set his mind on marrying her, and thought that the best way to please her would be to do all she asked him.

So Peter waddled up to Block saying:

"Come, baas. Let them fight. When they're

both dead, we'll plant them in the back garden to make the cabbages grow."

And Mynheer Block, who was not to be moved by personal peril from his old wicker chair, nodded sagely as he replied:

"Very true, Peter. Dead men make big cabbages. I will go with you."

So the two fat men, old and young, waddled off into the house, and Karin followed them, after a lingering glance at the two vigorous young men, who seemed determined to kill each other.

Then Maurice McMahon observed:

"Let's take off our coats, Mr. McMorris. It's a hot day, and I don't want to spoil my clothes with the perspiration. Ye fence remarkably well, sir."

Maurice McMorris smiled.

"I can return the compliment, sir. I don't know when I met the man before that could parry my straight carte over the arm."

"And ye seem to know me favorite fierce in opposition, as if ye were born to it," the red-headed man observed, as he laid his coat down, after folding it carefully. "Now, sir, if ye'll break that sword, so as to put us on an equality, we'll see who's the best man of the two Macs. Here's mine for ye, to measure."

Maurice McMorris laughed as he took the two swords, bent his own over his knee and broke it to an equal length with the other, saying, as he threw off his coat:

"There ye are, sir. Oblige me by getting on guard, and we'll see who's the best Mac."

McMahon laughed too.

"Ye're a man after my own heart, Mr. McMorris; and it's a pity I'll have to kill ye. Now I'll show ye some fencing ye never saw before. Hurroo!"

And he leaped up in the air with a regular Tipperary yell, and was advancing on McMorris with his shortened sword, when he suddenly stopped, leaped back, and cried out anxiously:

"Stop! stop! Holy fathers! I'd clane forgotten all about it. Here, here."

And he threw down his sword and dived into his breeches pocket, from whence he fished out a purse with several gold pieces in it, which he poured out on the grass.

"Mr. McMorris," he said anxiously, "I beg ye a thousand pardons for my forgetfulness. I owe ye the price of a new sword. If ye kill me take what's there and buy one after ye bury me decently. I'll promise to do the same by yourself. Now, sir, my mind's aisy. On guard, if ye please."

And in another moment he had picked up the sword, and both men were tilting at each other with an agility and power that was wonderful to see, their faces smiling as if they enjoyed it, though their teeth were clinched and the eyes of both flashed fire, while their lungs were made with a desperate ferocity that showed they both meant to kill each other.

So they leaped forward and back, wheeled and circled round each other, like hawks on the wing, thrust and parried, closed in to the terrible half-arm rally, when the stabs and returns went like lightning, and the clash of steel was incessant; and yet, after ten minutes' desperate contest, neither had been able to stab his opponent, though the breath of both was coming short and quick, showing that they were nearly exhausted.

But still they fought on, the laugh gone from their faces, which had become pale as death for weakness, while they could hardly hold their swords, and stood opposite to each other, glaring savagely and watching for an opening.

Then Maurice McMahon took a step forward, and Maurice McMorris instantly met him, when each gave a savage thrust at the other in the same time, as if resolute to kill his enemy and reckless of his own life.

Had they been fresh they would have killed each other, but they were so utterly tired out that both stumbled and fell at the same moment, just as a loud, powerful voice cried out, close to them:

"Holy St. Patrick! What the devil are ye doing, ye Dutch blackguards! Is it fighting we are? Come out of that, or, by the powers, I'll have a hand in it myself, so I will."

Both combatants looked up angrily, and beheld a tall, black-muzzled young man, with brilliant black eyes, and a beard of three days' growth on his chin, who was regarding them scornfully, as he swayed a huge two-handed club to and fro.

"Fighting, are ye?" he repeated. "And it's not Maurice O'Donovan that's goin' to see that widout takin' a hand. Hurroo!"

And up he leaped into the air, whirled his long club round his head, and finally made a sweeping blow at Maurice McMahon, that would have ended the career of that gentleman had he not dodged it, and ran in on the strange Irishman's guard, crying out as he did so:

"To my aid, McMorris! Drive the Corkonian into the canal, bad luck to him!"

And in another moment both men, in their exhaustion after fighting each other, plucked up new strength, fought manfully side by side, and, by closing in on O'Donovan, so that the Irishman could not use his long club, finally ran him across the road, stabbing all the way, but unable to hit him on account of his parrying with

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the handle of his weapon, till he tumbled over backward into the canal, when Maurice McMahon waved his broken sword, shouting:

"Hurroo! Erin go bragh! Give us your fist, McMorris. By the powers, I'll never fight ye again. The dirty Corkonian thief, to interfere with honest gentlemen at a little amusement of their own!"

And he shook his fist vengefully at the impetuous gentleman with the club, who was struggling to get out of the deep muddy water and sinking in a way that showed he did not know how to swim.

"Ah! drown, ye ill-mannerly devil," he cried, fiercely. "Serve ye right for interfering with your betters. D'ye know no better than to strike at a McMahon?"

The man in the water went under with a choke and a gurgle, and when he came up he clung desperately to the side of the canal, digging his fingers into the soft clay and ejaculating:

"Oh, mother of Moses! I'll drown, so I will. Oh, for the love of St. Patrick, gentlemen, pull me out, and I'll be your servant forever! Oh, murder, murder! H-e-l-p!"

And down he went again, when McMorris said, more soberly:

"Don't let the poor wretch drown, McMahon. He's had a lesson. Let him up for my sake."

McMahon bowed suavely.

"My dear friend, ye can command me in all things. Here, ye black-muzzled Paddy from Cork, catch that."

And he threw over one of the ropes at the drag-boat landing, just as the poor fellow was going under again, when both young men hauled him out, and McMahon sternly inquired of him:

"Now, what's your name?"

"Maurice O'Donovan, sir," returned the other, shivering and dripping. "Indeed, sir, I thought ye were two Dutch gentlemen, so I did, or I wouldn't have said a word, so I wouldn't."

"And where did ye come from, Maurice?" asked McMorris in his turn.

"Troth, sir, and I've footed it from that ould Rotterdam this blessed morning, along with my friend O'Donohue, bad luck to him; and the blackguard left me at that little village beyant, they call Boomfelt, so he did—all along of a little gossoon and his sister that wanted Maurice to come in, so she did."

Here Maurice McMahon burst into a roar of laughter, as he cried out:

"Holy fathers! will ye listen to that? Here's a heap of Maurices, and Macs and O's. There's McMorris, McMahon, O'Donovan and O'Donohue, and devil a one but's a rale Maurice; and they've all met together in Dutchland, and all begun to fight! This bates Bannagher! Maurice O'Donovan, ye thief of the world! run and get Maurice O'Donohue, and bring him here to us, till we give him a good b'ating for laving ye."

"Troth and I will, sir!" returned O'Donovan, delightedly. "I'll tell him two rale Irish gentlemen are here, and he'll come, so he will, if all the Dutch girls in Holland try to drag him back!"

And off went O'Donovan at a regular bog-trotter's lope, on the way to Rotterdam, while the other two Maurices looked at each other as if they began to enjoy the humor of the situation.

"Faith, McMahon," observed McMorris, "one would think ye'd studied the sword under the King of Cashel."

"And so I did," returned McMahon, simply.

"You did? And so did I!"

"You! Holy fathers! And why didn't ye say it before, McMorris? I'd never have fought with ye in the world."

"Because I didn't know ye came from the same school. When did you take your course, McMahon?"

"Five years ago."

"And I three."

McMahon uttered an oath of satisfaction.

"Hurroo! I thought I knew that man's school, and didn't want any new tricks. Ye've had two years the advantage of me, and ye couldn't bate me."

McMorris smiled.

"You forget I had you on your back once, and you lost your sword."

"But that was an accident. It was that fat ould spalpeen got in the way."

"You mistake—it wasn't an accident. I saw him behind ye, and drove ye on him. It was the last trick the O'Donnell taught me for a shindy."

"He did?"

"Yes."

"Ye did it deliberately?"

"I did."

McMahon sighed, and held out his hand.

"Galway bates! I thought the King of Cashel had taught me all he knew, but it seems he's learned another trick in two years. No wonder they call him the King of Cashel. Rodgerick O'Donnell's pupils can bate the world. Faith, McMorris, if you and myself join hands, we'll make a pretty little pair, so we will!"

McMorris smiled.

"Faith, McMahon, it's not much I have to boast of, but the O'Donnell's lessons and a trick

at drawing; but if you're going the same way as myself, I'll be happy of your company. I'm going to Berlin, to take service with the King of Prussia, if I can get a cadetship in the Hussars."

McMahon grasped his hand warmly.

"My dear boy, say no more. I'm going to that same place myself, and I've the best of letters from my aunt's second cousin's wife's sister, Lady Geraldine O'Flaherty, to the Lord Marshal Kaith. Surely well both go into the same regiment, we will. But what the devil makes ye think of the Hussars? I'd not think of that. No one knows them. I'm going to try for the Cuirassiers."

"Hussars or Cuirassiers, 'tis all one," returned McMorris, with a smile. "It's not much chance we'll have, I'm thinking, unless a war comes on pretty soon; but the school's a good one, they say, though I hear that the Prussian officers don't understand the use of the small-sword like the French."

McMahon shook his head.

"They don't; but between you and me and the post, McMorris, the small-sword's going out since the musket's improved; and the horse-soldiers use a sword for all the world like a shillalah—Hollo! here's old beer-barrel coming back to listen to the frogs. Maybe be thinks the shindy's over. Bad luck to him! He cost me an elegant sword."

And McMahon placed the remnant of his sword back in its sheath with a sigh, as old Mynheer Block waddled out, accompanied by Peter, plumped himself into his wicker chair and observed with a chuckle:

"No dead men to feed cabbages, Peter; but you can pick up all the money you find to pay for the damage done."

And Peter at once waddled over to where McMahon had emptied his purse on the grass-plot, and was stooping down to pick up the money, when the Irishman sent him sprawling with a well-directed kick in the rear, and observed, as he put back the scattered pieces in his pocket:

"It's no great matter, but we may as well have it for ourselves, McMorris. Let's go in to dinner."

Then, turning to Peter, he continued in Dutch: "Get us some dinner at once. I'm as hungry as a wolf."

Karin, who had ventured out of the door, now came up blushing and smiling, asking:

"Is this gentleman your friend now, Mynheer Moritz?"

"To be sure he is!" returned Mc Mahon, smiling, and chucking her under the chin, at which Karin looked angry and retorted, pouting:

"I didn't speak to you, mynheer, I said Mynheer Moritz."

"And I am Mynheer Moritz also my dear!"

"You Mynheer Moritz! But this is—"

Karin looked from one to the other, mystified, while McMorris and McMahon, both laughing, put each an arm round her waist and so marched her into the house crying in chorus:

"Dinner! dinner! Dinner!"

Then Peter Sloggerboom, who had risen from the spot where he had been landed by Maurice McMahon's kick, rubbed himself and said ruefully to his master:

"My father told me that he was once in Ireland, at a place called Cork, and that the people are all mad there. If it was not for that, I'd go in and strangle that man who kicked me."

Mynheer Block was slowly putting together his precious pipe, which had been unjointed during the previous disturbance. He looked up with a placid grin on his fat face.

"Never mind, Peter," he answered. "Your father has also talked to me about these Irish, and he told me that if they come to an inn with money in their pockets they are sure to leave most of it behind them. Go and wait on them civilly. Ask them if they would like a bottle of schnapps. Nothing like that to open the purse. Maybe they'll want a bed to-night."

"God forbid," muttered Peter. "They'd sit up all night and keep me up too."

But he waddled away to execute the order, and Mynheer Block sat listening to the frogs, who had recovered from their fright at the ducking of O'Donovan and resumed their symphony, till his eyes began to close as usual and he was nearly asleep, when he was roused by the sound of voices on the road from the village of Boomfelt, a few hundred yards off. Opening his eyes, he saw two big men, carrying long cudgels in their hands, coming to the Loost en Roost, and disputing loudly in some strange tongue, which he recognized as the same spoken by the two Irishmen.

Mynheer Block shuddered.

"More Irishmen, more horrible noise," he muttered.

"And surely these fellows have no money to pay for their noise. What shall I do?"

As he spoke, both men came on the grass-plot and one shouted out:

"Ye lie, ye Dublin jackeen! Belfast can bate Dublin any day in the week, and it's Maurice O'Donohue can bate any O'Donovan that ever picked a pocket. D'ye mind that?"

The speaker was a big burly man in a brown coat, with brown eyes, brown hair and a face so bronzed from exposure that he looked brown

all over, and he was talking to Maurice O'Donovan, who immediately gave a leap back and began dancing to and fro, brandishing his long cudgel and crying:

"And is it an Ulster man says that? Bad luck to ye, Maurice O'Donohue, but it's me maiden aunt's only nephew can baste the life out of any O'Donohue that ever stole a chicken out of the praste's coop, ye murdering Protestant blackguard! Whoop! Come on!"

And in another moment O'Donohue also was dancing to and fro, both men whirling their long cudgels in both hands, with a skill and dexterity that amazed the landlord, but neither striking a blow as they circled round each other, their faces exhibiting marks of the keenest delight.

Presently, with a motion so rapid that Block could not detect it both sticks flew out and met, when a tremendous rattle ensued as the two Irishmen plied their shillalahs like madmen, every blow parried and returned by another, with a noise like the patter of a heavy hail-storm, intermingled with the exultant yells of the two combatants.

The frogs ceased to sing in a fright. Mynheer Block groaned, and Karin began to scream in the house.

CHAPTER III.

THE DRAG-BOAT.

MAURICE MCMAHON and MAURICE McMORRIS were sitting at dinner when the noise began outside; and Karin, who was at the window, screamed excitedly:

"Oh, gentlemen, for heaven's sake stop them! They'll kill each other! They're crazy!"

McMahon arrested his fork to listen, and observed dryly:

"Faith, McMorris, the O'Donovan and the O'Donohue are at it again. Let 'em fight it out. It's only shillalahs."

And he went on eating, while McMorris said comfortingly to Karin:

"Don't be frightened. It's only two of our countrymen enjoying themselves after our national fashion. Let them alone."

But Karin, who was looking on spellbound, her hands clasped, called out:

"Oh, mynheer, look at them; it's terrible! Oh, how the clubs go, crack! crack! Oh they'll kill each other."

And she ran out, screaming at the top of her voice, while they could hear Peter and old Block roaring in the distance:

"Help! help! murder! murder!"

McMorris rose up with a sigh.

"Those stupid fools make too much noise, McMahon," he observed. "Let's go out and beat them both."

McMahon drained his glass and rose.

"With all the pleasure in life though, I think ye might have waited till we'd had time to finish the bottle. D'ye remember the back and knee trick, McMorris?"

"Yes."

"Try that. We'll take 'em together."

And the two young men went out, to find O'Donovan and O'Donohue panting for breath, glaring at each other, and hopping round and round, resting from a heavy rally, each watching for an opening.

O'Donovan had received a crack on the head, and the blood was trickling down his forehead; while O'Donohue matched him by a stream of crimson that marked his left temple, from a clip on the skull above it.

"Have ye had enough, ye Corkonian?" panted O'Donohue, as he hopped round, watching.

"Have I bate ye yet, ye Protestant baste?" responded O'Donovan, as he danced to the light, looking for an opening. "Dublin forever, and here's for the top of your head."

"And here's another for Belfast," retorted O'Donohue, as the cudgels met. "Cork or Dublin, it's all one, I can bate any Dublin jackeen that ever stepped."

And into the rally they went again, as fiercely as ever, when McMahon made a sign to McMahon, and the two young men crept softly toward the frenzied cudgel-players, who were too intent on their own quarrel to see that the long expected drag-boat was coming from Rotterdam, or to hear the loud cries of Peter as he ran toward it, cries answered by the occupants of the boat, gathered on the deck watching the fight.

The drag-boat was coming, and nearly a dozen men had jumped from it and were running up the towpath to the Loost en Roost calling out:

"Stop! stop!"

McMorris signed to McMahon, and the two young men crept forward behind the two cudgel-players, just as the latter grew faint and weary in their last rally.

A moment later came a loud cry of surprise and admiration from the men running toward the Loost en Roost.

Both young men had suddenly sprung forward behind the combatants, and each had clutched the collar of his man with both hands.

At the same moment up went the right knee of each into the small of his prey's back.

Then came a violent wrench and grunt from O'Donovan and O'Donohue respectively, as their heels flew up in the air, and both men were flung

flat on their backs, with a force that knocked all the breath out of their bodies, and sent the shillalahs flying from their grasp.

In another moment McMorris and McMahon had picked up the shillalahs and were scolding their prostrate countrymen violently, while the Dutchmen from the drag-boat came running up and formed a wondering circle round them, staring at the four Maurices in silence, open-mouthed.

The battle was over; for the fight had been taken out of both O'Donovan and O'Donohue by the stunning shock they had undergone.

Presently O'Donovan sat up ruefully, and said apologetically to McMahon:

"I ask your pardon, sir, I didn't know ye gentlemen was round, sir."

And then O'Donohue wiped the blood from his eyes, and observed dryly to McMorris:

"Ye're a strong gentleman, sir, and ye did the trick nately, sir. I'm looking for a place for a body-servant, sir, and maybe your honor would like a decent boy like myself, sir."

McMorris laughed and threw down the cudgel, with the remark:

"Go and wash your face, and I'll think of it."

"And I'll do that same, sir. Come, O'Donovan. You're a good boy, if ye are a Dublin jackeen."

"And I didn't bel'ave a Belfast man could hould a stick like that," returned O'Donovan, heartily, as he departed for the canal arm-in-arm with his late adversary, to all seeming the best of friends.

Then Maurice McMorris took the arm of Maurice McMahon, observing:

"Come in and let us finish that bottle. I've a mind not to walk a step further, but to go on in the drag boat."

"And by the powers I'll not be the man to quit ye first, Mr. McMorris," was the polite reply, as the two young men went back to their interrupted dinner, leaving the Dutchmen shaking their heads wisely as they stared after them.

Meantime, the drag-boat had come to its own landing-place, and had been secured there; while her passengers began to come ashore to take a glass of Mynheer Block's celebrated gin and water, for which the Loost en Roost was renowned on the canal.

Peter and Karin had so much running about to do that they had no time to pay particular attention to the Irish contingent; and the two Macs finished their dinner in the kitchen just in time to see O'Donovan and O'Donohue peeping in at the door, as if hesitating to advance further.

"Come in," said McMorris, kindly. "You've fought too well, and it's too rare a thing to see a countryman among these ditches to let ye go hungry."

"Ay, ay, sit ye down," echoed McMahon. "I'll pay for the dinner to-day. Here's bread and Dutch cheese; here's sausages; and here's a bottle of gin. Fall to, like true Irishmen."

O'Donovan's black muzzle expanded into a broad grin as he laid his hand on the bottle.

"Ah, yer honor, it's not the rale potheen; for devil a taste of smoke is there in it; but as long as the spirit's there, we'll do our best. Here's at yer honor."

Then the two young men went out, leaving their humbler countrymen to enjoy themselves, and strolled down to the drag-boat, where they found the skipper smoking his pipe on the forecastle, and watching his passengers drinking on shore.

The skipper's pipe was a common clay, for it was not every one in those days who could smoke a painted pipe like Mynheer Block.

He looked at them stolidly as they came up to him, and grunted a salutation.

"Goot tagen. What you want?"

"I want a passage to—where are you going?" returned McMorris.

"Hertogenbosch, Maestricht, Dort, Breda—where do you want to go?"

McMorris looked at McMahon.

"Where are you going?"

"Anywhere—nowhere, as long as my money lasts us. How much have you got?"

"It costs one thaler Prussian for each to Maestricht," interrupted the captain, severely; "and we pay in advance on the boat."

"Well, my friend and I will go there," returned McMahon, giving him a gold piece, "and—stop. Mr. McMorris, did ye say ye'd take the O'Donohue for your body-servant?"

McMorris smiled.

"What would a poor artist and soldier of fortune like me do with a body-servant?"

"It's necessary for ye to have one, and if ye'll take O'Donohue, I'll take O'Donovan. Ye don't know the customs of foreign service. I've had the honor of serving in Austria, and a cadet is thought nothing of unless he has a man for servant. Surely 'twas Irish luck that sent those two honest peasant boys to us to-day. They'll serve us as no German would, and we four Maurices can beat the world."

"But who told you they'd come with us?" asked McMorris. "You're counting early chickens, it seems to me."

"The passage to Maestricht is one thaler for

each person," again interrupted the captain, in his stolid Dutch way, "and the boat goes in less than ten minutes after I ring the bell."

"All right," returned McMahon. "Take four out of that twenty thaler piece, and give me the change at once. I take four places."

"The passage in the cabin is one thaler and seventy-five groschen," returned the captain, as he fumbled in his pockets. "All the quality go in the cabin. Do you want cabin?"

"Yes, yes, two in the cabin, the others on the deck," returned McMahon, impatiently. "Don't prate, but give me the change."

Which the captain accordingly did with great deliberation, and then proceeded to toll the great iron bell on the deck of the drag-boat, in a solemn, ponderous way, as if to tell passengers on shore that there was no great hurry, but the boat was going away, and they might as well know it.

The people on shore did not seem to care very much for the bell, for they kept on at their drinking and smoking as if they did not belong to the boat at all, and even when the captain called up the horses and began to cast off the lines from the shore they only sauntered slowly down to the bank of the canal, while more than one set out to walk beside the boat to Swarthook, for the sake of the exercise. The two Macs had time to go to the Loost en Roost, settle their bill with pretty Karin, for themselves and the "two O's," as they already called them, and then they set off to walk after the boat, which was slowly moving down the long stretch of canal, at the rate of about two miles an hour, at a liberal computation.

O'Donovan and O'Donohue made, as McMahon had predicted, not the slightest objection to following their countrymen as servants, and did not even stipulate for wages. They were both members of the peasant class of Ireland in those days—a century ago—perfectly content to follow the "gentry" wherever the latter pleased to lead them.

McMahon and McMorris were "gentry," and O'Donovan and O'Donohue were therefore only too proud to follow them, and seemed to think that they had found their fortunes at once, as they stepped out after their new masters, though one rode on horseback, the other walked on his two feet.

It was even amusing to hear them squabbling about the merits of their chiefs, as they followed.

"I'm McMahon's man," said O'Donovan proudly, "and me master rides a horse."

"And my master's name's McMorris, and the McMorris were Kings of Leinster where devil a McMahon was heard of," retorted O'Donohue.

"If me master chooses to walk, it's not because he co'dn't afford to ride, but becuse his liver's out of order through eating too much rich food out of the gold dishes in his father's castle."

"Ah gwan out of that," retorted O'Donovan. "I tell ye the McMahons of Castle McMahon has their dishes set with diamonds and rubies, and ates nothing but peacock and such, whin they're to home. Don't I know, Maurice? Sure our fortune's made anyway; for ain't we both got places as gentlemen's servants, and ain't we got nothing to do but travel for our health?"

Pretty soon they caught up to the boat, and McMahon called to O'Donovan:

"You ride my horse beside the boat. I'm going on board with Mr. McMorris. We've our passages taken to Prussia."

Then the two Macs went on board, and sat down on the roof of the cabin, surveying the motley crowd of Dutchmen and Dutchwomen on the decks, chattering to each other over the news of the market, smoking or drinking from the old fashioned wicker flasks first made in Holland.

"And now, McMahon," said McMorris, "since we've met so strangely here and neither of us knows the other, suppose we exchange our confidences a bit."

"With all my heart, my dear boy. Will ye begin or shall I?"

"I'll begin and set the example of frankness by saying that I was a Jacobite at fourteen, and ran away to Scotland to be in with Prince Charlie at Prestonpans."

McMahon held out his hand.

"I was an ensign in the Royal Irish at Prestonpans, and I kilt a thief of an English dragoon on me nineteenth birthday. But I don't remember you, my boy."

"I didn't get there," said McMorris, with a sigh. "I rode into camp the day after, and the Prince said I'd better go home; I was too young to do anything. But I stuck to the army, and they gave me a drum, which I carried at Culloden."

McMahon shook his head.

"I didn't get there. I had a chance to enter the Irish brigade and be in at Fontenoy, where we kilt the British so nately. And since that I've been takin' service wherever it suited me, till now I'm twenty-nine, and devil a comission have I that's not expired. But how did ye get off after Culloden, McMorris?"

"I didn't get off," said the other simply, "I

was knocked on the head and left for dead; but an old peasant woman found me and took pity on me as a poor boy, when she found I was still breathing. So I was smuggled off home, and my mother made me promise I'd never go soldiering again till I was twenty-four."

"Your mother was a sensible woman," returned McMahon emphatically. "What's the good of a gossoon on a battle field, when a man can pick him up in one hand? And so ye went to learn from Roderick O'Donnell, Sword King of Cashel, did ye?"

"I did, after I was twenty-one, and had gone through Trinity College. I spent all my patrimony in the learning what I know after my mother's death."

McMahon sighed.

"Divil a mother I ever had at all McMorris, and what d'ye think of that, now? I've had nather father nor mother for twenty-seven years, and had to live on me wits and me sword."

"And how did you come to know O'Donnell?"

"He came over to Paris to fence with Monsieur Le Grace and the Duke of De la Motte, and he bate all of them so 'asy that I said to myself, faix, McMahon, that's the only master I'll have. And I put all the savings of five years into his hands to teach me, and devil a rap do I care for money now."

"And you, like myself, are going to seek your fortune with the King of Prussia," said McMorris, in a musing tone. "They say that any one who has true merit can rise in his service."

McMahon shrugged his shoulders.

"Rise? Not much chance of a rise in this long peace. If we only had a good solid war now."

A slight cough behind them attracted their notice at this moment, and they looked round, to see a rather short gentleman in a coffee-colored coat, with a black scratch wig and gold-rimmed eye-glasses, eying them keenly but not unkindly, as he tapped his snuff-box before taking a pinch.

He had the appearance of a plain tradesman in some respects, but the long flute case that he carried under his arm gave him also the look of a traveling musician.

He smiled and bowed politely as he said:

"Good-day, messieurs. I presume, like myself, you are traveling to Maestricht?"

"Yes," returned McMahon, rather coldly. "The boat goes there, I suppose."

"And from thence where?" asked the stranger. McMahon frowned and McMorris stared. The man in snuff-color spoke very good French, and was therefore probably a gentleman; but he was most undoubtedly free with his questions.

"Where are we going?" echoed McMorris. "Well, sir, that is a question we should ask you, but we have refrained on account of our manners. In Ireland we consider it rude to question strangers."

"Aha! you are Irish, then?" cried the man in snuff-color in an animated way, taking not the slightest heed of the rebuke. "I like your countrymen, monsieur. They are brave, courteous, and they make good soldiers after they have been brought down to discipline. From what part of Ireland do you come, monsieur?"

He addressed McMahon, who, thinking him a character, answered:

"Tipperary."

"Aha!" echoed the stranger, "I know Tipperary. I have a friend who was born there, one Carroll."

McMahon jumped up.

"What! Carroll! Jack Carroll that used to be with Desmond in the Irish Brigade? Jack Carroll that went to Prussia? My dear friend, you're a thousand times welcome. Jack taught me how to ride a horse. Where is he, and what's he doing?"

The stranger drew up his face with a look of reserve, as if he had said too much, as he noted McMahon's eagerness, and replied, coldly:

"I know him slightly, you understand, slightly: that is, he is in Berlin, I hear."

"But where, where? Is he an officer?"

"I believe so."

"What rank?"

"A—major, I believe. Do you know him?"

"Know Jack Carroll? Holy fathers! I tell ye he showed me how to ride a horse first, when he was a captain and I a cadet."

"And you, monsieur," continued the stranger, turning to McMorris, "from what part of Ireland come you?"

"From Galway," returned Maurice, shortly.

The man in brown smiled.

"From Galway, indeed! Ah, I have heard Carroll say that the men of Galway and Tipperary could not meet without fighting. Is that true?"

"Faith and ye can swear to it," said McMahon, dryly. "Didn't we fight like tigers this blessed day, and only for that fat spaldeen of a landlord I'd have pirked Maurice here."

The man in brown smiled.

"Indeed. Then did you fight as did your two mad countrymen? I saw them as I came up in the drag-boat, and truly they looked as if they would make good dragoons if they were taught the sword. And so you're going to Berlin, are you? Are you thinking of taking service?"

"Sir," said McMorris, haughtily, "I think that, for a stranger, you ask too many questions. Come, McMahon, let us go forward."

And he took his friend forward among the other passengers, while the man in snuff-color only laughed slightly to himself, as if amused.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MUSICIAN

The drag-boat moved along the canal in the true, deliberate Dutch style, for the rest of a long summer day; four huge dray-horses pacing along in front, with bells on their collars, though two would have been sufficient; the passengers smoking on the forward deck or walking on the towpath for variety; the same monotonous green meadows on either side; the same rows of wind-mills dotting the horizon above the same pollard willows. Every now and then they came to a placid, sleepy Dutch town, where everybody, to the dogs and cats, was fat, clean and sleepy; and everywhere the population came to the doors to stare at the boat, with the same interest they had evinced from their births.

Nothing seemed to change in the peaceful land of Holland, and even the wild spirits of the four Irishmen became insensibly attuned to the prevailing quiet, as they slowly dragged along through the landscape.

Even Maurice McMorris, who was proud and averse to being questioned, found himself once more on the roof of the cabin, near the man in the coffee-colored coat, whose shrewd, thoughtful face showed that he was probably a person of intelligence, and then entered into conversation again.

"A sleepy country this," Maurice observed, as they slowly swept along. "I should not like to live here."

The stranger smiled.

"Why not, monsieur?"

It seemed as if the coffee-colored man could not speak without asking questions.

"Because I like excitement," answered Maurice, "and it seems as if excitement were impossible among these people."

"Why do you like excitement?" queried the other. "Do all your countrymen like it?"

"I believe they do. We like fighting and making love, and hunting—anything to stir the blood."

"Have you ever served in the army, sir?" asked the stranger suddenly.

Maurice blushed.

"Once, when I was a boy."

"Indeed? In whose service?"

"In that of Prince Charles Edward, of England, at the battle of Culloden," returned Maurice proudly. "We were beaten, but we were right."

"And was that your first experience of war? You must have been a child then."

"I was fourteen—old enough to carry a drum."

"And since then, what have you done?"

"Studied the art of war. I have made up my mind to be a soldier. See here, monsieur, you are not a Hollander, are you?"

The stranger smiled.

"I am a poor German musician. Why do you not go to Berlin?"

"I have thought of going there, but—"

"But what?"

"I know no one at court, and I do not want to enlist as a common soldier. I am told that the discipline is strict, and that the very corporals can use the stick on the men. I believe—"

"You believe what, monsieur?"

"I believe that if a corporal raised a stick to me, I should kill him."

The stranger smiled.

"Are you then noble?"

"I claim descent from kings, monsieur."

"Indeed! Have your people any kings?"

"They had once, monsieur. But never mind that. A king without a crown is a poor creature."

The stranger laughed shortly.

"You have not much respect for kings?"

"Why should I, monsieur? I see that they have no rights the people respect. Charles Edward, the rightful king of England, is an outcast, called the Pretender, and a stupid lout of a German is called king of Great Britain."

The stranger looked at him sharply.

"Do you know, monsieur, that if your Charles Edward had been unfortunate enough to gain the throne he fought for, he would probably have made a very bad king?"

"Possibly, monsieur, but he never had the chance to try it, and that was wrong."

The stranger shook his head.

"He did not know how to fight. A king should be a warrior, or he must expect contempt. You say you are going to Berlin. What arm of the service do you prefer?"

"The cavalry," returned Maurice, warmly. "Can you doubt it? A cavalier is a king in his saddle, while a crawling infantryman has all the work and none of the honor."

"The cavalry, eh? Can you ride well, monsieur?"

Maurice smiled.

"When I have a horse. At present I have

none, and fear I shall have to go into the infantry or enlist as a common soldier, if I want to ride."

"And you prefer the cavalry, do you? But you must remember that the infantry bear the brunt of all the battles."

"Yes, but without cavalry they can win nothing but an empty field."

"But they can beat cavalry, man to man. Do you not think so, monsieur?"

"No," cried Maurice, eagerly, "no, no, a thousand times no. You don't understand military life, sir, or you would not say it. Good cavalry, well pushed, can go anywhere and do anything in the world."

The stranger took a pinch of snuff.

"As you say, I don't understand military life. I am only a poor musician. But it seems to me that a line of men with muskets could shoot down all your cavalry before they could get near enough to cut at them with their long swords. Remember that the Prussian infantry can fire three volleys a minute."

"Never mind that," answered Maurice, who was enthusiastic in his cause. "Give me a good regiment of horse, and I'll ride over them. They may fire, but half their bullets will miss; and the nearer my horsemen come, at full speed the more your infantry will get frightened and fire wild. I tell you, sir, that good cavalry can never be beaten."

"Here comes your friend," observed the stranger as McMahon came up. "He has served. Let us put the point to him."

Maurice nodded.

"Agreed. I know he'll decide for me."

"See, monsieur," said the man in brown to McMahon, "your friend and I have a point to refer to you. Do you think that cavalry can beat infantry man to man?"

"Man to man!" echoed McMahon. "Surely they will, and one to two besides. Haven't I seen them do it at Fontenoy, bad luck to the British blackguards. Didn't I ride in Clare's regiment myself? A cavalry officer should go over anything and everything in the way. If he don't he's not fit to be one."

"I must bow to your decision, being but a poor, peaceful musician; but let me ask you this:—Suppose a cavalry officer was surrounded and compelled to surrender. What then?"

"What then?" echoed McMahon. "What then? Bah, it's impossible. I'd defy the King of Prussia to do it, as long as I had my horse. I'd cut my way through his whole army. Surrender? By my faith, monsieur, no cavalry officer has any business to surrender. I'd break him if he did it, bad luck to him."

The stranger laughed heartily.

"You are enthusiastic, monsieur. But you cannot seriously mean to say that under no circumstances could a cavalry officer justify himself in surrendering?"

"I do mean that same, monsieur," cried McMahon, hotly. "Surrender? Never! Not if a whole army surrounded me. Sure, if I was killed, I'd kill two to one of the enemy, instead of letting them take me for nothing."

Here McMorris put in:

"I suppose you've never seen any cavalry, monsieur, at Berlin?"

The stranger looked amused.

"Well, I've seen some there. The king thinks he has some good regiments, but he has never been able to get them to face infantry."

"Of course not," returned McMahon, scornfully, "because he never had the right men to lead them. He's paid so much attention to his footmen with the muskets that the other fellows don't know what cavalry means."

"Indeed!" returned the man in brown, dryly. "I had thought that the King of Prussia was counted as a fair soldier; but probably you know how to manage his army better than he does himself. I should recommend you not to go to Berlin with such notions in your heads, for the king is said not to love opposition."

McMahon uttered a contemptuous sort of snort.

"My musical friend, you don't suppose I'd back down from my opinions, even for the King of Prussia? I've served as long as he has, though I'm not as old, and I've served in half the armies in Europe. Your Prussians are all very well, but you want Irishmen to make your horse fight as they ought to."

Then he checked himself, adding:

"Ah, what's the use of talking, after all? We're going to Berlin, it's true, but it's little chance we'll ever have to show what we can do, as strangers with empty pockets. Pardon, monsieur, for wearying you with arguments that must be distasteful to a quiet musician like you."

"On the contrary," returned the man in brown, "I take some interest in military affairs, and I was anxious to hear by what arguments you would support your assertion that cavalry can, under any circumstances, beat infantry. I hope some day to see you in Berlin, gentlemen. I frequently go to see reviews there."

McMorris laughed good-humoredly.

"No doubt you'll see us there, after all our brave talk of cavalry, marching in the ranks with muskets on our shoulders, because we're too poor to buy horses and enter the cavalry as

cadets. That is, I am: McMahon here will be a cuirassier or dragoon, I doubt not."

"Who knows?" answered McMahon, laying his arm on the other's shoulder, "I may have enough for both when I sell Mawmet."

"And who is Mawmet?" asked the stranger.

"Mawmet is my horse yonder on the tow-path. Do you notice him, sir?"

The stranger looked at the beautiful bay horse that was following the drag-boat, and observed:

"He is a handsome horse, but too light for your weight, I should say."

"Not a bit of it—the blood's in him. That is an Arabian, sir, from the Sultan of Morocco, and his brother in England has sired more winners on the race-course than any horse in the land."

The man in brown looked interested.

"Where did you get him?"

"Stole him," was the laconic reply.

"He was in the French King's stables at Marly, and they couldn't do anything with him for vice: so they sold him to a carter, and he nearly killed him with blows and starvation. I saw him in a cart, and knew him by his head, so I stole him."

The man in brown laughed.

"I see you are a humorist. You do not mean literally stole him?"

"I gave fifty francs for him, and I call that stealing, Mr. Musician. I won't sell him to any one but the King of Prussia, unless I get a price such as the king would offer."

The man in brown took a pinch of snuff.

"And what should you call such a price?"

"A thousand thalers," Maurice returned, promptly. "He's worth ten, to improve the breed of cavalry alone."

"Or carriage horses," returned the other, thoughtfully.

"My friend, when you go to Berlin, if you like, I will give you a letter to the director of the royal stables. He is a friend of mine, and even the humblest friend may be of use at such times."

"With all my art," said he McMahon, heartily. "I'll take it kindly, Monsieur—Ab! what name shall I call you by?"

"I'll give you the letter at once," returned the man in brown, evading the question; "and if ever you come to Berlin, I hope to see you. Good-night, gentlemen."

And he went off, with a certain slight nod of the head, as if used to discussing men, when McMahon observed, thoughtfully:

"McMahon, that man is not a poor musician, at all. He talks more like a soldier."

"Devil a one of me cares," answered McMahon, with a yawn. "If his letter's any good at the stables, and we sell Mawmet for a good price, we'll have enough to enter the Guards in style, both of us, as cadets, and bring in our men besides. This boat is enough to make any man sleepy, Maurice; I'm going into the cabin."

And not long afterward he was fast asleep, while the more romantic and impressionable McMorris was busily sketching the banks of the canal.

CHAPTER V.

BERLIN.

A huge rumbling wagon drawn by six horses one before the other, rumbled slowly into the city of Berlin over the stone bridge crossing the Spree, one morning in July, with a single horseman ahead of it, riding slowly, as if not wishing to outstrip the wagon.

The animals that drew the vehicle were huge Mecklenburg cart-horses, with ponderous frames, hoofs as big as the head of a flour barrel, and a walking pace of about two and a half miles an hour. Each horse had his mane plaited with string and his tail made into a short braid, tied with straw, while his harness collar supported a huge square of leather, that stood up like a sail, and he carried a bell on his head-stall.

The horseman, on the other hand, rode a slender bay that looked like a pony beside the Mecklenburg giants, and he had to keep the curb rein stretched all the time, to prevent the animal from walking away at six miles an hour.

As the sun rose, he reined up to a halt to let the wagon pass him, and called out in English:

"Hola! McMorris, ye lazy devil, are ye asleep yet, or do ye want to try Mawmet before we sell the baste? We'll be in the city in a minute." The curtains at the rear of the wagon tilt parted and Maurice McMorris looked out eagerly at the city.

The early rays of day glanced crimson on the waters of the Spree sparkling in the foam bubbles that floated slowly past, the spires of the city shone in the early light, and at the end of the stone bridge stood a guard-house, with a stiff Prussian sentry pacing before it, while the roll of drums and the shrill blare of cavalry bugles beyond, sounding the reveille, announced that our adventurers were approaching a military city, and a life very different from the placid sleepy content of Holland, which they had lately quitted.

"Ah, this is more like life," the young man

arted enthusiastically. "Ride Mawmet, did you say? Nay, my friend, the horse is yours, and I don't wish to enter Berlin under false colors on another man's horse. No, no; ride Mawmet, and enter the guards, where ye belong. I'll have to be content with the infantry."

"Ye'll do no such thing," returned McMahon sharply, "we've met in a strange land, and we're going to stick together, McMorris. I want ye to take the horse, because ye can talk the German, and I've not mastered the jaw-breaking lingo yet. We'll have to bargain with that thief of a director with the hard name, bad luck to him— Well, and what do ye want?"

He broke off as the sentry in front of the guard-house, who had let the wagon pass peacefully, suddenly leaped out with fixed bayonet pointing at Mawmet, crying:

"Stop!"

"Stop!" echoed McMahon. "Well why the devil don't ye give a proper challenge, ye Dutch blackguard? Isn't the sun up? Ye don't keep countersign by daylight, do ye?"

The sentry called out something in German, to which McMorris, from the wagon, replied, and added, in explanation to McMahon:

"It's not allowed to enter Berlin armed, it seems, unless one's in the service. We must give up our weapons and the corporal will give us a receipt for them."

The wagon here stopped, at a hail from the sentry, and a stiff-looking corporal came out of the guard-house, buttoned up, powdered, pigtailed, with a harsh, forbidding scowl on his face, and a voice like the setting of saws.

This functionary cross questioned them as if they had been children as to their object in coming to Berlin; and but for the fact that McMahon did not understand half that was said, there would have been trouble at the bridge over the Spree; for the hot-headed Irishman was used to carrying things with a high hand.

McMorris, however, was cooler, and after his declaration that they had come to Berlin to enter the service of the King of Prussia, and that their weapons were to be employed in the king's service, the corporal let them pass, observing in German to the sentry:

"More fools coming to the sacrifice. They'll find out what it is, and it's not my business to warn them of the future."

McMorris heard him and told McMahon what the corporal had said, but the Irishman only laughed as he answered:

"He's an old soldier, and I'm another. It's an old trick trying to frighten recruits. Besides, he's an infantryman, and they hate the horse. I'll take the risk of it. Now let's look for the inn 'Old Snuffy' told us about."

"Old Snuffy" was the name McMahon had given the inquisitive man in the brown coat whom they had met in Holland, and who had, as he had promised, given them a letter to Herr Pferdsnagel, director of the royal stables, signed "Fritz Koller, flute-player."

"I wonder what has become of that man, and whether we shall ever see him again," said Maurice musingly. "I can't help thinking he was an impostor, and no flute-player."

"Impostor or not, we'll soon find out," said McMahon. "He didn't borrow any money of us, if he was an impostor; and we'll try the effect of his letter on old what's-his-name."

"Pferdsnagel. That means horse nail."

"Faith, a good name for a stableman. Come, let's get away from the wagon now. I'm not anxious to be seen coming into a big city like a pauper, McMorris, and I see a sign down yonder street that looks like an inn, if they have any inns in this country."

Maurice McMorris came out of the wagon, after calling up their two followers, and the four Maurices soon found themselves installed in the Hotel de Brissac, a small place kept by a Frenchman, which had been recommended to them by the snuffy flute-player, and which they found all that he had represented it to be.

Then the two Macs started out to take a look at the city, after paying a little attention to their toilet, leaving O'Donovan and O'Donohue at the hotel stable, with directions to groom Mawmet and make him look his best, while their masters found the royal stables.

It seemed rather strange to the two young men, as they walked out, to reflect that they had two body servants with them, while their whole stock of wealth, now that they had arrived at Berlin, consisted of a single twenty-thaler piece wherewith to support four people.

"If we don't sell Mawmet at a good price, I'm thinking we'll all have to go into the infantry," observed McMorris as they walked along the broad and level street.

"No need of that," returned McMorris, "rather than have him sacrificed, you take him into the cavalry, and the rest of us will enlist with you."

"I'll do no such thing," said McMahon firmly.

"I know the difference between the position of a gentleman cadet and a private soldier. If the worst comes to the worst, we must foot it, but always as gentlemen. Ah, here's a big street, and the Berliners are early risers. I see."

They had just entered the Friedrich Strasse, two miles long, which ran through the heart of

the city, and walked along, admiring the carriages that were driving past.

"Faith, McMorris," observed McMahon, "it's not for want of beauty we'll die. Look at the ladies in the carriages. What's taking them out so early?"

They noticed that all the carriages were going one way, and that quite a crowd of foot passengers were following.

"What's going on?" asked McMorris of a stout German who was hurrying along.

The German stopped politely.

"Do you not know?" he said. "The gracious king has just returned to Berlin, and holds a grand review this morning, before the heat of the day. You appear to be strangers. Come with me, and I'll see you get a good place."

He seemed so good-natured that our friends were delighted with him, and McMorris observed:

"Yes, we are strangers, and hardly expected a civil answer from you to a question that must have seemed silly to you."

The German smiled.

"We Berliners are always polite to strangers. Our king sets us the example, and welcomes them from every land. In Prussia any man can rise, if he has it in him."

"And where has your king been?" asked McMorris of their new friend.

The German laughed heartily.

"What! haven't you heard? Ah, you must have just arrived. It was all over the city last night, for the first time."

"What was over the city?"

"The story. It seems that no one knew the king had left Prussia at all."

"Had he then left it?"

"Yes. It is funny, very funny. It seems that he gave it out that he had gone to Potsdam, and had shut himself up to write a book; but in the meantime he has slipped out of his kingdom with no one but Dessen, his cabinet hussar, disguised as a musician; and has traveled all over Holland, in a drag-boat, meeting all sorts of adventures, and no one knew who he was. It is like our king to do that. He is the greatest king in the world, and I don't wonder he gets tired of living in state all the time."

"What does he say?" asked McMahon, and when McMorris translated he exclaimed:

"By the powers, that's like ould Haroun al-Rashid used to do. Ask him how they found it out."

"It was discovered on the frontier," answered the German, laughing. "It seems that the king, when he went into Holland, forgot to take a passport with him, and a Dutch postmaster arrested him and Dessen for impostors. The king asked permission to search in his baggage for his passport, which he said he had forgotten, and they let him do so. Of course it was easy then for him to make out his own passport, which he did under the name of Fritz Koller—"

"Fritz what?" echoed McMorris.

The German repeated the name, and went on:

"That took him into Holland, but it seems that the postmaster still suspected him, and wrote to Count Einstein, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, to know if such a paper had been issued from his office. Of course it had not, and so, when Mr. Fritz Koller came back, he was arrested by the same postmaster as he was crossing the frontier, and it all came out. They say the good king was at first angry at the discovery, but he forgave the postmaster, who was horrified when he found whom he had insulted, and gave him his choice of an office in Prussia on account of his fidelity to duty. That is our Fritz all over. He adores devotion to duty."

McMorris translated the news to McMahon, who uttered an exclamation of wonder.

"Holy fathers! Fritz Koller! Bedad, Maurice, it was himself we saw, and by my faith we trat'd him like an ignoramus. D'y'e mind how ye told him he didn't know anything of military affairs? Ha! but he's a deep devil, that king, and I'm thinking he'll be having the laugh on us when he sees us here."

"Never mind," said McMorris, resolutely, "I told him nothing but truth about cavalry, and I'm ready to stick to it if he sees us."

The German looked puzzled at their talk, and asked, hesitatingly:

"Did the gracious gentlemen by chance meet our king in Holland as Fritz Koller?"

"I think we did. We met a Fritz Koller—a short man in a black wig and brown coat."

"That was the king. The very dress. Did he tell you he'd see you in Berlin?"

"He did."

"Then you may depend on it, he will. Our king forgets nothing and no one. See, there comes the escort, and he will soon be here. You can see for yourselves if it be the same. We are close to the reviewing place."

As he spoke, the street widened into a broad square, full of troops, coming in from the side streets to the sound of martial music, and they heard the clatter of horsemen at a trot coming up behind them, while the crowd of people on the sidewalks began to push to the curb and shout violently as a squadron of horse in white coats, with bright helmets and drawn swords, came dashing by.

"There go the Life Guards," cried their

friend, eagerly. "That's Prince Henry in front. Yonder's the Duke of Bevorn, and there's old Ziethen. Hurrah! Long live the king!"

And all the people shouted themselves hoarse as the cavalcade swept by at the sight of a small man with a keen aquiline face on a bay horse, who glanced right and left as he rode, and looked very insignificant among the bright uniforms and flashing gold lace round him. For this little man wore a rather shabby blue coat with yellow breeches and rusty boots, a three-cornered hat, something the worse for wear, and but for a great star of diamonds on his breast no one would have imagined that he was the lord of all around him.

Yet this little man was the King of Prussia, and McMahon gripped McMorris by the arm and whispered:

"It's himself, faith. It's Ould Snuffy, and he'll know us again, bad luck to him. We might as well get out of Berlin, for he'll never forgive us for telling him he knew nothing about cavalry. Look at the Guards, man. They ride like soldiers, and I couldn't better them if I tried, which is saying a good deal."

"Wait," said Maurice in an undertone. "Let us see them maneuver. I've not served as you have, it's true, but I don't give up for the honor of Ireland."

They strayed off to the side of the square, and noticed that every one made way for them as soon as they were seen to be strangers. The Berlin people seemed remarkably polite to strangers.

"We can see this every day; but you have come from afar to see the best soldiers in the world," remarked a stout baker, as he made room for them on a high step that commanded a view of the square. There, gentlemen, now you can see. The infantry are in line, and the heavy cuirassiers are going to trot by. Saw you ever such horsemen?"

Truly they had to admit that they had not, though McMorris had seen the British Life Guards, and McMahon had served in France and Austria. The troops in that square, horse and foot, with only just room to move, passed through the most complicated evolutions at a rapid pace, and the affair ended with a march past, the infantry at a run, the cavalry full trot, that elicited from McMahon the acknowledgment:

"Bedad, McMorris, I came to teach, and I'll stay to learn. Devil a point c'd we give them; but, by the powers, I'm more than ever set on selling Mawmet and joining the Guards. Come on with me. I'd not miss the chance for a dozen Mawmets."

And he lugged McMorris off down the side streets to where they had heard the royal stables were situated, planning on the way what they should do with the money for the sale of the horse, and how much they should get for it. "A more thing they were set. They would go into the cavalry somehow."

CHAPTER VI. ENDING FRIENDS.

HERR YOUNG PFERDSNAGEL, Director of the Royal Stables at Berlin, was a real veterinary surgeon, in the days when veterinary practice was for the most part in the hands of ignorant smiths, and he was proportionately proud of his position and knowledge, while irascible and impatience of contradiction.

Herr Pferdsnagel was proud of his stables, as the "only scientific establishment in Europe," as he often said, and he could point to a record of twenty years, from the "old king," Frederick William's time, in which he had never lost a horse from disease or failed to cure a case of sickness if taken early enough.

The Herr had but one fault in his master's eyes. He was an intense German, who refused to learn French, though he knew the king hated his native language, and probably would have been dismissed long before from his post but for the fact that his services could not be dispensed with.

Herr Pferdsnagel had a uniform of which he was as proud, as of everything else, for he ranked as a captain of cavalry, and was entitled to wear spurs on his heels at all times, which he did—his detractors asserted—even in bed.

However this may be—and we doubt the story—it is certain that Herr Pferdsnagel enjoyed the clink of his spurs so much that he passed a large part of every day in pacing up and down in front of the stables with his nose in the air, listening to their music, as contentedly as did Mynheer Block of the Loost en Roost to the frog symphonies of the canal in Holland.

Herr Pferdsnagel was a little, dried-up, waspish man, with a pigtail that curled up behind his collar, and a face like dried plums, so full of wrinkles was it.

He had fierce gray eyes and bushy gray brows, and was always clean shaven.

On the morning when our heroes arrived in the City of Berlin, Herr Pferdsnagel was unusually irascible, because the king had addressed him in French and pretended not to understand his German reply, and therefore it was with the fiercest of frowns that he turned in

his street when he heard some one behind him say:

"Monsieur, if you please—"

Wheeling round with a stamp, he beheld two tall young men, one in blue, the other in green, looking down at him as if they were rather amused at his somewhat comical little figure.

Herr Pferdsnagel colored and said briskly:

"I am the Herr Director, and no monsieur. I don't talk French and I hate the French. You will say Herr Director."

"Well, Herr Director," answered the young man in green, "we have come to ask you if you want to buy a beautiful horse."

"Horse? horse?" echoed the Herr Director, scornfully. "Do you think I've nothing to do but buy horses from the French? No. Get out."

"But this is not a French horse at all," interposed McMorris quietly. "It is an Arabian, or rather a barb, like the Godolphin Arab who has done such wonders in England."

The Herr Director looked at him sharply.

"What do you know about Arabs?" he said. "We have none in this country. Besides, they are little ponies, and no use for our purposes."

"Nevertheless," said Maurice, "we were sent to you with this letter by one Fritz Koller, whom we met in Holland. Read what it says."

The Herr Director took the letter grumblingly. The story of the king's Holland adventure was then in every one's mouth in Berlin, and he had heard it with the rest, so that he could not deny knowledge of who Fritz Koller was.

The letter ran:

"HERR DIRECTOR:—You will oblige me if you will purchase of Mr. Maurice McMahon a valuable horse he has with him for breeding purposes. He asks a thousand thalers for it. Give him what you think is right, considering the value of the Arabian blood to cross on our large, heavy horses for cavalry purposes.

Thine, "FRITZ KOLLER."

Herr Pferdsnagel looked sourly at the friends.

"Where is this paragon? Why did you not bring it here, you blockhead?"

"Because I'm not a horse-dealer, blockhead," as sharply answered McMorris. "If you want to see the beast send a man to the Hotel Brissac and tell my servant to bring it up."

"Your servant!"

The magic word "servant" produced an instant change in the Herr Director. A young man who had a servant must be noble, or at the least rich, even if he did come on foot.

"If the honorable gentleman will please to enter my office I will send for the horse," he said, with a low bow, and he ushered them into his private apartments, while he sent off a hussar, one of the few on duty as a stable guard, to bring Mawmet, with a message from McMahon to O'Donovan.

Then the Herr Direc'or waxed confidential to his guests, and began to tell them all sorts of things about the "old king" and his famous tall regiment of grenadiers, of which the degenerate successors were such miserable copies, according to him.

When Mawmet at last arrived, Pferdsnagel, who was really a good judge of a horse, quickly appreciated the animal at its true value, and willingly paid them the sum demanded, which McMahon at once divided into two piles, and pushed one over to McMorris, saying:

"Not a word. Ye helped me in the bargain, for I can't talk a word of German. Now we'll go into the cavalry together, and O'Donohue and O'Donovan shall enlist at the same time, so we four'll always be together. Just ask the ould, dried-up spalpeen what's the best regiment for two Irish gentlemen as cadets."

"What regiment?" echoed Pferdsnagel when Maurice repeated the question. "For a stranger, I say, by all means take the new Hussars. The king has but just raised two regiments of them to beat the Austrian pandours, and they offer the best chance for promotion, always supposing there be a war."

"And why not the Guards," asked McMahon, in whom the splendid appearance of those troops, as they trotted by, had aroused great enthusiasm.

"Because," said Pferdsnagel laying his finger on his nose shrewdly, "between you and me, the Guards are no good for a campaign, as General Seidlitz discovered ten years ago."

"Why not?"

"They are big men, and they kill their horses. So they are always kept in the rear, petted and made much of, till the time comes for desperate service, when they are put in. The Hussars go here, there, everywhere and do anything."

"I told you I had a love for the Hussars," observed McMorris, "and you would Cuirassiers, McMahon. Now what say you?"

"I say it's indifferent. I'll go in any one you've a mind to name. Ask him what regiment to go in?"

"Ziethen's old regiment, assuredly, gentlemen; for Ziethen is a steady, quiet old general, not a wild maniac like Seidlitz. The Third Hussars, by all means. They are quartered in Silesia, but the recruiting station is here, with a squadron that often acts as guard of honor to the king."

"That's good advice, Maurice," observed McMahon as he came away and walked to-

ward their little hotel, minus a horse, but plus a good thousand dollars. "Our horses won't cost as much, for they're lighter, and the uniforms not as expensive as the Guards'. What d'ye say to going to head-quarters at once?"

"With all my heart. To tell the truth since I've seen that review, I'm impatient to serve under the great king of Prussia."

McMahon laughed.

"Ye'll get over that. Wasn't I as wild in '45, when I joined Clare's regiment, but we had so much idling after Fontenoy, the time came when I wished I wasn't a soldier at all."

"But we came here to join the army. Didn't you say you had a letter to the Lord Marshal Keith?"

"Ay, from me kinswoman Lady Geraldine O'Flaherty; but I'll not be wanting it now."

"Why not?"

"I'll be finding Jack Carroll, ould Jack, that taught me my first soldiering. Ah, but we're in luck to have Jack for a friend. He's an Irishman to the back-bone, and won't forget a countryman in distress."

"Then let's go and find him. But where is he?"

"Divil a one of me knows; but he's a major. We'll just ask every officer we meet if they know Jack."

They had not far to go in Berlin before meeting an officer, for the town swarmed with troops, and very soon they met a tall officer of the Life Guards, stalking along, who stopped with politeness when greeted in French, and answered:

"Carroll, Carroll? No, gentleman, I do not know any Major Carroll. The nearest name that I remember is Karl. We have a Major Karl of the dragoons of the Guard."

"And what kind of a looking man is he?" asked McMahon. "Our Carroll was a very tall man, with his face pitted with small-pox and hair as red—well as red as mine."

The German shook his head.

"Our Major Karl is gray-headed, nay, his hair is quite white, though they say he is not fifty yet."

McMahon looked puzzled.

"Not fifty? Sure Jack was only twenty-eight when I first saw him at Fontenoy, and that's only ten years ago. But tell me, monsieur, this Major Karl, is he Irish?"

The German smiled.

"That can hardly be. He is a Pomeranian, as I understand. We have but one Irishman that I know of in the Guards, but he is not Karl."

"And what is his name, monsieur?"

"It is a curious name, Balikaro."

"By the piper, it's our man, I believe. He was always Carroll of Bally Carroll; and faith he must have taken the name of his castle. Where does Major Bally Carroll live, sir?"

"Down the second street to the left. He lodges at the house of a widowed compatriot of his, one Frau Kasidi."

"Cassidy by the hokey! It's our man, Maurice. Thank ye kindly, sir. Come on, Mac."

And they hurried down to the street named, where they saw, at a little distance off, a gigantic officer in the uniform of the dragoons of the guard, dismounting from a big black horse at the door of a small house, and heard him shouting in the unmistakable accents of their own tongue:

"Mrs. Cassidy! Mrs. Cassidy, ma'am. For the love of God, ma'am, is dinner ready? I'm starving with these field days and no chance, so much as to smoke a pipe. Where's that thief of a Fritz Stock, bad luck to him?"

"Hier, mein herr," growled a man inside, as a gray-headed soldier in undress uniform came out of the house and led away the horse.

The big officer looked up and down the street before entering the house, and saw our two heroes coming toward him with the obvious intention of speaking to him; so he paused to let them come up and displayed a strong, sensible face, deeply marked with the small-pox, and a grizzled red mustache.

"'Tis himself," muttered McMahon, "and little changed from the Jack of Fontenoy. I'll see if he knows me."

He went up to Carroll, saying in French:

"Is it Major Carroll, formerly of Clare's brigade?"

The giant face softened and became melancholy, as he answered with a sigh:

"Ay, monsieur, more's the pity. The old brigade was good enough for France in her hour of peril; but 'twas broken up in peace, and it's now they'll be wanting us, I'm thinking. You have an Irish face. Are you a countryman?"

McMahon held out his hand.

"Jack Carroll, ye old bat, are ye blind that ye don't know Maurice McMahon? Faith, and I knew ye, first glance."

Carroll's ugly but kindly face expanded into a broad grin of pleasure as he said:

"Maurice McMahon! By the powers, ye'll come in and have dinner or we'll have a fight."

which he was known in the Prussian service—was one of those officers who live on their pay and are compelled to economize closely to make both ends meet.

The dinner was plain and scanty, and Mrs. Cassidy, widow of a defunct sergeant in the Guards, officiated as cook, waitress, laundress, and everything else in the major's household, assisted by Fritz Stock.

But after the dinner Major Balikaro brought out a bottle of real Irish whisky, which he had kept in reserve as one of his greatest treasures, and brewed a jorum of punch, saying as he poured it out:

"It's the last in the locker, boys, but if we can't be happy when we meet countrymen for the first time in ten years what's the use of living at all. Here's to old Ireland, and may we live to see her free again."

And the three Irishmen drank in silence that toast that has been pledged so often for hundreds of years, and seems as far to day from its realization as it was five centuries ago.

"And now, gentlemen," pursued the major, "what can I do for ye? Ye can command me in everything, I assure ye."

Thus urged the two friends opened their hearts and told why they had come to Berlin, asking their countryman's advice as to what corps to enter, and telling him the funds they had in hand.

Balikaro rubbed his hands with an air of great satisfaction.

"Ye'll take the Hussars, by all means. If I was not so heavy I'd go there myself, but you're both middle-weights, and can ride a horse light enough for the work. Ye'll go to Baron Ziethen, at the depot of the Third, and enter yourselves as gentlemen volunteers at once. If ye wait till to-morrow the places may be full, but I know there's two vacancies to-day."

"Would you go with us?" asked McMorris hesitatingly, "to introduce us?"

"No," the dragoon answered decidedly. "Twould do ye no good, and might do harm. Ziethen's a cross-grained old chap, and he might ask why I didn't take ye into my own squadron. No, ye'll go by yourselves, and if ye take my advice ye'll do it at once. Then come back and tell me how ye've got on. I can help ye after ye're once in the service."

"We'll go," declared McMahon, starting up. "Jack knows what to do, Maurice, and the sooner we're off the better."

So they took a hasty leave of their new friend and went off to the depot of the Third Hussars, which they soon found.

When they inquired for Colonel Baron Ziethen they were directed to the riding school, where they found a grizzled, square-built man of medium height, in a once gorgeous hussar dress much the worse for wear, watching the agonies of some new recruits learning to trot without stirrups, and growling out reproofs and directions alternately to the riding-master who was training them.

He gave the new-comers a quick glance as they came in, but did not notice them till the lesson was over, when he inquired:

"Well, gentlemen, what do you want?"

He spoke German, and McMorris answered:

"We wish to find the colonel."

"I am the colonel. What do you want?"

He spoke roughly, with the manner of a man who was impatient of forms, and McMorris, seeing his way, answered:

"We wish to enter the Hussars as gentlemen cadets, and to bring in two recruits besides, who will make good soldiers and act as our servants."

Ziethen bent his bushy brows and growled out:

"Gentlemen cadets are nuisances. I rose from the ranks, and never had a servant till I owned two horses."

"Nevertheless," said McMorris quietly, "there are two vacancies in your depot squadron, and we apply for them. To show you that we are not ignoramuses, I will say that we have both served. My friend here has been an officer in French and Austrian service, but as yet does not talk German."

Ziethen eyed them narrowly.

"You look stout fellows," he said at last, "but I don't want any recruits that cannot ride. We may have work soon and I don't want any more cubs to lick into shape."

Then he said to McMahon in French:

"And you, monsieur, have you ever served?"

"In Clare's regiment, at Fontenoy, and till it was disbanded. Afterwards in Trenck's own regiment of pandours."

"And why did you leave them?" asked Ziethen more keenly than before.

McMahon shrugged his shoulders.

"Faith, because one of them couldn't take a joke, colonel."

"A joke? What do you mean?"

"I mean that he quarreled with me about a lady, and I was compelled to run him through the body, which, as he was a captain, and I only a cornet, was an offense against military discipline. So as I heard I was to be put under arrest, I just gave them leg bail, and left the service for fun."

CHAPTER VII.

FITTING OUT.

The Irish major's quarters proved to be of the humblest nature, for Balikaro—the name by

Ziethen shook his head.

"I'm afraid you won't do for this regiment. My Hussars only fight outside of the corps, and quarrels are unknown among us."

"I'll engage to keep the peace, colonel, if you'll take me, for two reasons."

"What are they?"

"First, I see that your discipline is strict and, second, I admire the corps. I did not admire the pandours. They were a lot of thieving blackguards, with officers whose only merit was noble birth. My comrade and I are Irishmen—"

Ziethen interrupted him.

"Irishmen. What are your names?"

"McMahon and McMorris."

"Enough, gentlemen. I've heard of you before. I'll take you. You can go to the quartermaster, Lieutenant Schlaghammer. He will furnish you with your outfit at government price. You are, of course, able to pay for it."

The old colonel's face had cleared up, and McMorris was surprised at the change.

"You say you have heard of us, colonel?" he asked. "May I know whence?"

Ziethen smiled maliciously.

"From a gentleman who plays the flute. You are to have a chance to prove whether you know more of the cavalry service than myself, for example, who have been in the saddle for thirty years. You will find the quartermaster yonder in the office, and the adjutant will enroll you. Good-day, gentlemen."

And he turned away with the same grin of sarcastic meaning, when McMahon observed to his friend:

"The king's told him all. Faith, McMorris, we'll be on our mettle from the first day's service, so we will."

McMorris took his arm and they went toward the quartermaster's office.

"We have an opportunity, at least," the young man said, as they went. "The king has had sufficient interest in us to mention us to the colonel, and we shall be tested early. Let us do our best for the honor of Ireland."

"We'll do that anyway," McMahon answered, and then they went in to see Lieutenant Schlaghammer, who proved to be another grizzled old officer, with a long pig-tail and a sour face, who asked them all sorts of questions, and finally sent them to the adjutant to be enrolled before he would furnish them with anything.

The adjutant was another old soldier, a little sourer than colonel or quartermaster, who cross-questioned them on points of service, as if they had been officers, snubbed them in the rudest way whenever they ventured to ask a question in turn, and seemed to be trying to do all he could to disgust them with the service.

But as they persisted he finally enrolled them, and said gruffly:

"Now you're soldiers, so remember to take off your hats to an officer. Stand up and salute. You gentlemen cadets are more trouble than you're worth. Right about face, animals. Go! March! To the quartermaster and get into the uniform of the corps as soon as you can. You're detailed for escort duty in the morning, and if you fail, you're to be reduced to the ranks by the king's order. Go!"

He seemed to take a pleasure in being as overbearing as possible and McMorris flushed up angrily, but McMahon, usually the hottest in temper, gripped his friend's arm violently, and saluting with the other hand, said:

"Thanks, my officer."

The adjutant had spoken French from the first, unlike Ziethen, who hated the language.

They wheeled about and marched off to the quartermaster, who looked up, asking:

"Well, are you enrolled?"

"Yes, my officer," returned McMorris.

The quartermaster started up with a fierce scowl, thundering out:

"Take off your hat then, animal! Do you not know that respect to superior officers is the first duty of a soldier?"

Again McMorris flushed deeply; but, as he saw McMahon take off his hat and stand bolt upright before the arrogant quartermaster, he followed his example, and Schlaghammer grunted out:

"Hum! that's better. We'll see whether you two foreign ignoramuses can teach us Prussians how to ride and fight. Now then, what do you want of me?"

"Cadet's outfit," said McMahon saluting.

"Here's the list. Arms, uniform, horse equipments and horse. The last costs a hundred and fifty thalers, nearly equal to all the rest. The total is three-hundred and twenty-seven thalers twenty-five groschen. Have you the money with you?"

"Yes, my officer," said both in chorus.

"Hand it over then."

McMahon dived into his pocket and laid the money on the table before the officer, who scowled over it, and haggled over every piece, but was finally satisfied with the amount tendered by both, after which his manner perceptibly softened inasmuch as he saw that both had plenty more money left.

He took them to the storehouses and stables where he permitted them to choose their own horses and equipments, after which he said,

more affably, as they were going to the quarters of the cadets in the barracks, to put on their uniforms:

"You understand that, while you cadets are to be held to the strictest accountability when you are on duty, there is a social difference betwixt you and the common soldiers, and that you are expected to associate only with your fellow cadets and the officers of the regiment. Here is the cadets' barrack. You will have no duty to do to day except at the stable call in the evening, and if you can find two soldiers who will undertake to be your orderlies, you will have none but military duties. You are on the list for vacancies among officers, and it will depend on yourselves whether you earn a position. Goodday."

And he went away, leaving the two friends alone in the cadet barrack-room, which was empty at the time of their visit.

McMahon looked at McMorris and said in a grave tone:

"D'y'e know, we're not favorites here. We'll have a hard time in this regiment, and we two will have to stick together or the rest will ride over us."

"What makes you think so?"

"Little things. The news is all through the corps that we've said we knew more about cavalry than the king and we've got to show it, or be snubbed by every one."

"That's not fair for a few thoughtless words."

"I know it, but we're Irish. That means that all the world's against us, so we must stick by each other. We'll go down and bring up O'Donovan and O'Donohue. They shall enlist and be with us. Then, if we four Irishmen can't hold our own, I'll own that Ireland's no good."

They put on their uniforms and went down to the Hotel Brissac, where they paid their bill and told O'Donohue and O'Donovan to follow them, which the honest peasant boys were only too willing to do, when they heard what was to be done.

The two cadets went once more to the office of the adjutant, who scowled at them with more ill-humor than before, but was unable to find any fault with their demeanor, so he asked:

"Well, what now, cadets?"

"We have brought two recruits, my officer," said McMahon stiffly. "They are stout and active. We wish to have them detailed as orderlies to us, if not against the rules."

The adjutant could not help a grunt of satisfaction as he looked at the four tall lithe young men before him, and muttered, as he took down the names of the recruits:

"Potz tausend! They'll make good food for powder, if we ever have a war."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE KING'S TEST.

THE loud blast of the bugle awakened our heroes next morning in the barrack, and McMahon, jumped up and shook McMorris, crying:

"Wake up and dress. Ye forget ye're soldiers now, and reveille's sounding."

McMorris scrambled out of bed and saw that the room was full of young men hurrying into their clothing, talking to each other in broken sentences, but carefully avoiding so much as a look toward the two Irishmen.

They had come in, the night before, one after the other, without noticing the two Macs, and seemed disposed to ignore them entirely now.

The hurried preparations for roll-call were only just completed when the bugle sounded again, and the ill-tempered adjutant looked in growling:

"Come, ye cadets, fall in for roll-call out on the parade. Three days' arrest for dirty buttons and general untidiness, remember."

The cadets fell in, perfectly silent, and marched out to the parade, where they found the whole squadron drawn up dismounted, and where they took their place at the right of the rest, having the privilege of hearing their names called by an officer, instead of a sergeant.

Then the cross adjutant, whose name was Von Blum, came round and looked at every cadet narrowly, passing from front to rear, looking for faults and at last cried out:

"Cadet Baron Gougenheim, three days' arrest for that shako. How dare you come on parade with such a mark on it?"

The cadet addressed, a dissipated-looking young man with a pale face and blood-shot eyes, made no answer but to salute and say:

"Thanks for the punishment, my officer."

The fact was that Gougenheim had been very drunk the night before, and had dropped his shako in a mud-puddle, and the mud had dried on it in the dark, while he had put it on in such a hurry in the morning as not to notice it.

"Count Lillenthal," pursued the adjutant, "two days' extra guard for that button off. You cadets are nuisances, and if I have to give you privileges, I'll take care to hold you to account for them."

"Cadets Markmarn and Markmoritz, step out of the ranks."

The cadets could not help turning their heads to see who owned these names, but when the two Irishmen stepped out and saluted, Von Blum after a scrutinizing look, observed:

"You'll do. You are detailed for escort duty to his majesty. Report mounted, at my quarters, in half an hour, fully equipped for service."

The two Irishmen saluted, and the adjutant then dismissed the cadets, when our heroes went to the stables, saddled their horses, which they found already groomed and fed by their indefatigable orderlies, and came up to the front of the office on exact time, as the adjutant stepped out of the door, watch in hand, ready to find fault, had they been a second late.

He allowed a grim smile to cross his face as he observed not ungraciously:

"Very good. You will make soldiers in time. Now ride to the palace and report to his majesty's officer of the day, Baron Pollmeyer. You will know him by the red sash over his shoulder."

He turned away into the office, but looked back to add:

"His majesty wishes to see if you know as much as you think you do."

Then he disappeared, and McMahon observed as they rode slowly off:

"They're going to try us at something or other, and I fancy I know what it is."

"What?" asked Maurice anxiously.

"I think he's going—the king, I mean—to put us into some corner and test whether we can cut our way out. 'Twas an unfortunate boast I made, that a cavalry officer should never surrender under any circumstances."

"And you think he'll try to hem us in?"

"I do."

"Very well, then. In that case we must cut our way out."

"Easy said, but we can't cut at our own men."

"Why not, if the king chooses to say they are our enemies, McMahon?"

"True for ye boy, but I'd hate to do it."

"So would I. But if there's no other way to do it, I'd take the king himself," said McMorris, setting his teeth firmly. "Remember, we're all alone, and he has an army behind him."

McMahon shook his head.

"He won't put us to that risk, I fancy. He'll try us in some place where he thinks we can't get out, and if so, we've got to get out somehow. Can your horse leap, McMorris?"

"I don't know. He seems to be a good one."

"Ay, a Hungarian, I'll go bail. They mostly leap well. See, yonder's a puddle. See if they'll jump over it."

The two hussars put their horses to a canter and leaped over the puddle as if it had been a ditch, with a regular wavy motion that showed they could depend on their animals.

"Now, if we don't have a ten foot wall," said McMahon as they rode on, "I'll go bail we'll go over anything we meet. If it's a ten foot wall, jump up on your horse's back and climb over. Don't let him think he bates ye, for the honor of old Ireland."

"Never fear," returned McMorris, confidently. "I wish we hadn't said what we did; but now we're in for it let us stick to it for the honor of Ireland. Yonder is the palace. What's going on?"

A troop of the Horse Guards was drawn up on the esplanade, the riders dismounted and standing by the horses' heads, while an officer with a red sash sat on his horse, looking toward the broad street up which the two hussars were coming.

"Walk the horses," whispered McMahon.

"Don't give them an opportunity to scold us, for they're watching for it."

Then they rode up to the officer, who gazed at them sourly as they saluted, and said:

"So you are the new cadets. I don't see that you're any better than the rest. Dismount, till his majesty comes out. You're to ride behind him to-day."

The two hussars dismounted as they were told, and the sour officer went off to the palace and left his horse there, while he entered; when a muttered buzz of conversation rose among the tall, stalwart dragoons, who glanced at the two strangers as if discussing them.

McMahon and McMorris remained standing by their horses, both conscious of an unusual excitement, for it was evident that every one disliked them.

But they took care to stand up like soldiers and look as careless as possible, while McMahon curled his red mustache and looked at the long line of guardsmen, muttering:

"I'm able for any of ye if ye want a foight, ye Dutch blackguards."

McMorris, less irascible and more curious, kept looking at the palace door, and was soon warned by the roll of drums that the king was coming for the guard turned out at foot of the steps; Count Pollmeyer hurried out, and called the mounted escort to "Stand to horse," and presently the alert figure of the king, in his plain blue and buff, with the star of jewels on his breast, came out of the palace.

Frederick stopped an instant to touch his hat and glance approvingly at the Guards, then

came down the steps, mounted his horse and rode up to our two hussars, who still stood by their chargers, looking to the front.

"Count Pollmeyer," said the king in his cold sarcastic tones, "who are these?"

"The cadets your majesty sent for," the officer answered looking surprised.

The king smiled mockingly at them.

"Only two cadets, Pollmeyer? You do not know them yet. They aspire to teach us all what cavalry should be. Well, gentlemen, do you still think I have no men to lead my horse?"

McMorris looked up and met the king's eye fixed on him searchingly. He saluted and said:

"Your majesty has no right to accuse us for words uttered in a foreign country, before we were soldiers of the King of Prussia."

The king laughed good-humoredly.

"Well answered. And you, Monsieur McMahon, do you still think that under no circumstances should a cavalry officer surrender?"

"McMahon looked up with a twinkle of fun in his brown eyes.

"Not being a cavalry officer now, sire, I have no right to form an opinion."

The king slapped his thigh and seemed still more pleased at the retort.

"Still better answered. You evade responsibility well; but I—I am different. I am determined to fix it on you."

Then turning to Pollmeyer, he said:

"Count Pollmeyer, I appoint these gentlemen supernumerary cornets of hussars. They are officers henceforth."

McMorris stared and felt confused; but McMahon muttered to him:

"It's coming. Mount. We're officers!"

Both hussars sprung on their horses, and McMahon took off his bat saying:

"We thank your majesty, and await orders."

The king smiled grimly, took out his snuff-box and observed as he tapped the lid:

"You are ready of wit, both of you. Count Pollmeyer, mount the escort and let us go. You gentlemen will follow me."

A few minutes later the whole cavalcade was moving down the street toward the Spree at a walk, and the king beckoned up the two hussars, saying graciously:

"I wish to converse with you, gentlemen. You were free enough of tongue with Fritz Koller, and you will find Fritz Hohenzollern not such a bad fellow, perhaps. Monsieur McMorris, how do you like my army?"

"I think it is very handsome, sire," said Maurice.

"Handsome, eh? Do you mean it is only good to look at, for example?"

"No, sire. It is good to look at, and I fancy it is good to fight, but I do not know that yet."

"Well answered. And you, McMahon, do you think these body-guards of mine are incapable of taking you prisoner, if I give them the order to do it?"

McMahon hesitated.

"I hardly think it would be fair to give them the order, sire."

"Why not, why not?"

"Because I should not be at liberty to resist."

"Aba! You are as good as ever at evading the responsibility. Very well. I give you leave to resist them. What then?"

"Then I doubt whether your majesty will give the order."

"Why not?"

"Because, being on peace-service, my pistols are unloaded."

"So are theirs, so are theirs," returned the king sharply. "Come, monsieur, let it be sword to sword."

"Then your majesty is willing to lose at least five of your soldiers?"

"How, sir—how?"

"Because my comrade and I will certainly kill three before we are killed ourselves."

The king laughed.

"Well answered. Come, I will test you. They shall not draw their swords, nor shall you. It shall be man strength."

"Then I defy your majesty to take us," returned McMahon, firmly.

The king nodded, like one well pleased.

"Be it so. We shall see. The test shall be fair."

He beckoned to Pollmeyer, and whispered in his ear some orders, when they continued their ride down the street toward the bridge over the Spree, by which the friends had entered Berlin the day before.

Presently Pollmeyer galloped ahead to the bridge, and they saw the guard turning out at the guard-house; while the king, as if he had forgotten all about the matter, went on:

"And how do you gentlemen like Berlin?"

"Beautiful, sire," returned McMorris, warmly. "In art, at least, we acknowledge that your majesty has nothing to learn."

"But in military science, something," laughed the king, good-humoredly. "Well, monsieur, we live and learn. I am not too old yet to take a lesson, or give one."

As he spoke, the roll of drums drowned his voice as the bridge guard presented arms, and the king raised his hat in reply.

"Send the escort over first, Pollmeyer," he observed to the count.

"You gentlemen will stay by me till they have passed. I want you to look at them."

The three drew to the side of the road, and the troop of Life Guards rode by—brawny six-footers on big horses, stern, powerful-looking men.

When they were on the bridge the king followed, a slight smile on his face, but said nothing till they were at the middle of the stone structure, when he suddenly drew his sword, shouting:

"Seize them, Pollmeyer! Gentlemen, you are my prisoners!"

McMahon and McMorris instantly wheeled their horses to flee, the former barely escaping the king's hand on his bridle.

As they turned, they saw a line of infantry with fixed bayonets cutting off retreat, while the Horse Guards were wheeling round with a clatter of hoofs to seize them; and the king cried sternly:

"Surrender! surrender! You are my prisoners!"

"Not yet, your majesty!" cried McMahon, in high, excited tones. "Not yet! A cavalry officer never surrenders! Come, Maurice!"

And before the heavy horsemen could close in on them, the two hussars, with a wild Irish yell, leaped the parapet of the bridge, side by side, and went down into the dark waters of the Spree with a loud splash, leaving the heavy dragoons dumb with amazement, while the king took a pinch of snuff, and observed, dryly, to Pollmeyer:

"They are madmen, but they are not such fools as you thought. They have made their boast good, you see."

CHAPTER IX.

THE HUSSARS' TRIUMPH.

THE stone parapet of the bridge was about three feet high, and the crown of the arch at least twenty feet above the water; but the current of the Spree is barely perceptible at Berlin and, beyond a ducking, our heroes had nothing to fear from their leap.

Both went down under the dark waters, but both re-emerged in another minute, when their horses began to swim steadily for the further shore; and McMahon said to McMorris:

"We must not be taken when we land. I see a pier yonder, coming down to the bank, that those heavy fellows cannot leap. Swim to the further side, and let us report to the king under a flag of truce, till we know it is peace."

McMorris nodded, and they urged their horses to the spot indicated, noticing that the bank was already lined with people watching them, waving their hats and shouting. They looked up at the bridge, and saw the face of the king looking down at them, smiling.

Then, as he saw them making for the pier, Frederick turned his head and said something to Count Pollmeyer, who dashed off with a dozen dragoons; and they could see him going at headlong speed through the streets, on the further side of the Spree, to cut off their landing on that side.

McMahon set his teeth, muttering:

"Ye're not satisfied yet, aren't ye? Now, by the piper that played before Moses, I'll show ye that we know how to take a party through an enemy's country."

They swam steadily on, watching the shore, and just as they reached the pier beheld the helmets of the Life Guards at the end of the street, a squad of ten men, with Pollmeyer at the head, coming down full trot.

But they managed to land below the pier, rode up the bank, and then down the street facing the river till they reached the next, when they heard the clank of weapons behind, and saw that Pollmeyer had drawn his sword and was coming on full gallop with his men in pursuit.

McMorris was about to urge his horse, but McMahon said:

"No; let them come nearly up, then give them the go by. We can outrun them."

So they walked their horses on till they heard the voice of Pollmeyer shouting:

"Surrender, gentlemen! You've no chance! Give up your swords!"

McMahon looked round and waved his hand, with the formula:

"A hussar officer never surrenders to a dragoon. Good-by, count."

Then they dashed off at a gallop, and as their horses were fresh, speedily distanced the heavy dragoons behind them, laughing as they heard the guttural German oaths of the big men toiling after, the people cheering them from the sidewalks, for the news of the test appeared to have spread over the city with lightning rapidity.

When they saw that they were out of danger of pursuit, they slackened their pace to a trot, and McMahon observed:

"And what'll we do now, McMorris?"

"Surrender to the king," returned McMorris. "We have shown him that his soldiers cannot take us. Now let us find him and report for orders under a flag of truce."

"And where'll we find him?"

"He will probably be coming up the next street from the bridge. Here's a cross street. Let us go cautiously."

They dashed into the side street, and, as they crossed into the next, saw the king coming leisurely along at the head of his Guards.

Here McMahon seemed puzzled.

"So far I know what to do, but now, bedad, you'll have to take the lead, McMorris. Ye understand human nature better than I."

McMorris had already drawn out his white handkerchief, and was waving it to the king, who immediately pulled out his own in answer.

"Advance," said McMorris. "He wishes a parley. Be ready to dash off if he tries any tricks; for I'm sure he's set on giving us a humiliation if he can."

They rode up to the king, and McMorris called out:

"Is your majesty satisfied, or do you wish to test us further?"

The king smiled good-humoredly.

"The test is over for the day. I am quite satisfied that you two would not give up your swords without a fight."

"Then we surrender," said the young man, replacing his handkerchief. "As soldiers of the King of Prussia, we are liable to punishment for resisting arrest; but if your majesty sees fit to pardon us for the breach of discipline, we trust you will remember that we did not surrender to force."

The king laughed, and then his face became grave again, as he said:

"You have shown that you are fit for the duty of officers on scouting service, but I am about to put you to a severer test. You both talk French well, and one of you talks German. I shall send you some orders to-night that will put you on duty elsewhere. In the mean time you can depart home to your quarters. Report to your adjutant that you are promoted. You will find the bridge guarded against you, but if you are as shrewd as I think, you will find a way to get home. Count Pollmeyer has orders to arrest you yet, if he can. Now, farewell, gentlemen."

He nodded slightly, and as they looked around, there was Pollmeyer coming after them again, his horse white with foam, the dragoons after him at a slow trot.

The two hussars bowed low to the king and galloped away, followed by Pollmeyer, till they came to another bridge over the Spree, about a mile above that which they knew to be guarded.

A single sentry was at the further end, but he did not oppose them until they were nearly opposite, when he saw the dragoons coming on the bridge, Pollmeyer violently gesticulating to stop them.

Then he jumped out with fixed bayonet, shouting:

"Halt!"

In a moment McMorris had drawn his curved hussar saber, swept aside the bayonet with the back of his blade, and the two hussars galloped off, laughing, McMahon calling back:

"A cavalry officer never surrenders!"

The sentry shouted, and the guard came running out, but the fugitives were half way up the street, the people shouting as they went, and so rode into the barrack square of the Third Hussars, and dismounted in front of Adjutant Von Blum's office, where they found Colonel Ziethen and his adjutant in the midst of some papers, hard at work.

Ziethen looked up with a scowl as they entered.

"Do you know that cadets never enter without knocking? That is a privilege reserved for officers."

McMorris saluted.

"We are no longer cadets, colonel. His majesty has appointed us supernumerary cornets, and has ordered us to report as such."

The colonel's face showed his surprise.

"Is that true? What have you been doing?"

"Maintaining the reputation of the Third Hussars, colonel," said McMorris, proudly.

"Good, good! How did it happen?"

"His majesty was pleased to say that his Life Guards were able to take us prisoners; so he hemmed us in on the bridge over the Spree, and we had to leap into the river."

Ziethen rubbed his hands.

"And did none follow you?"

"No, colonel. We swam the river, and finally surrendered to the king alone."

"You did right. After all, you may make good soldiers if you are not too confident. Who led the pursuit?"

"Count Pollmeyer."

Ziethen burst out laughing.

"You are good fellows, and have won a hundred thalers for me."

"How, colonel?"

"I bet Pollmeyer only last night that my hussars could never be captured by cuirassiers, and you have proved it. Aha! there he comes now, by heavens!"

Outside the barrack they saw Count Pollmeyer and his squad pulling up their foaming horses and dismounting, with the evident intention of entering the office.

Old Ziethen's eye flashed.

The insolent heavy dragoons! Do they think

I'll let them take my men here? Sound the alarm, Von Blum."

In another moment Count Pollmeyer, his face crimson with anger, strode into the office, followed by four dragoons, and cried, pointing to the two Irishmen:

"Arrest them in his majesty's name! I'll show them whether the Guards can be beaten!"

Old Ziethen snatched up his sword from the table, shouting:

"What does this mean? Do you know who I am, fellows? Back, all of you!"

The dragoons, who knew Ziethen well, hesitated, but Pollmeyer faced Ziethen, crying:

"Did you hear my orders? I said his majesty's name. Resist, if you dare!"

"Retire to your quarters under arrest, sir," roared Ziethen, still more fiercely. "Do you think I don't know my duty? I am your superior officer, and I order you from here at once."

"And I am the king's officer of the day," cried Pollmeyer as fiercely, "and I order you to give up those prisoners."

"I shall do no such thing," answered Ziethen, compressing his lips, but more calmly. "I will be responsible to his majesty for these gentlemen. They are my officers, hussars, and I defy all the Life Guards in Berlin to take them. See, there come my men, count. Will you retire and pay your bet, or do you wish trouble?"

There was a noise and shouting outside as the hussars, who had been alarmed by Von Blum, came running to the office.

Only that morning the two Irish officers, or cadets, had been objects of dislike in the corps; but already the news of their gallant feat had spread, and every hussar was willing to join with them against their common rivals, the heavy dragoons.

Before Ziethen had finished speaking, at least fifty hussars surrounded the dragoons, and into the office bolted O'Donovan and O'Donohue, flourishing their shillalahs, which they had preserved carefully, and roaring:

"Where's the Dutch spalpeen that wants to hurt an Irishman? Hurroo!"

Count Pollmeyer was surprised in his turn by the sudden interruption of foes, and before he could recover his wits, he found all his men prisoners, each held by three or four hussars, while old Ziethen was laughing and crying out:

"Third Hussars, be quiet! Don't hurt the poor delicate dragoons. Now, count, will you pay your bet, or shall I send you a prisoner to his majesty, for not minding your own affairs, as you ought to?"

Pollmeyer was deeply mortified, but he saw it was useless to struggle; so he made the best of a bad case, and said to Ziethen, sullenly:

"I've lost. The joke has gone far enough. It is not fair to set fifty on ten."

McMahon whispered eagerly:

"Colonel, oh, for the love o' God, tell him we'll fight them man to man. We four can do it."

"What four?" answered Ziethen.

"We four Irishmen. We've kept the honor of the regiment so far. Let us try it again."

Ziethen nodded.

"I give you leave."

McMahon advanced to Pollmeyer, bowing.

"Monsieur," he said politely, "you have just uttered an injurious taunt at the Third Hussars. You have complained that we are fifty to ten. I will take you prisoner, single-handed; my friend here will take any other officer of your regiment you please, and our two orderlies here shall do the same by any two of your men, out in our riding school, if the colonel will restore you your arms and give us his gracious permission."

Ziethen nodded.

"Certainly. Select your antagonists, and I myself will see fair play."

Pollmeyer eagerly caught at the offer as a means of escaping from his mortification. He had in his troop a cornet of the Guards, and in a few moments more he had selected two burly troopers, with whom he repaired to the riding school, all the hussars following to look on, a tacit truce being proclaimed in the meantime between the heavy and light horse. Old Ziethen had become good-humored and jocular at the prospect of another triumph for his favorite regiment, and the hussars were on the tip-toe of expectation as to the result of the contest.

It was agreed that every one was at liberty to use who weapons he liked, and that if the four hussars could not take the four dragoons prisoners, Ziethen's bet with Pollmeyer was to be declared off. If they did take them, the bet was doubled.

All four dragoons mounted their horses and drew their long straight swords, while the four Irish hussars did the same at the opposite side of the riding school.

The contrast in horses was great, for the Life Guards rode huge heavy blacks, weighing at least thirteen hundred pounds each, while the wiry Hungarian hussar steeds barely exceeded a thousand pounds each.

The men were all nearly equally tall, but the hussars were thin and lithe, their foes broad and burly, even to Pollmeyer.

Ziethen gave the signal at last, and both parties charged, when the heavy horses went off at

a slow canter, showing that they were tired out after long chase, while the lighter hussars were nearly fresh.

The Irishmen had not said a word to each other before starting, when McMahon cried out in the first jump:

"Trip them up, boys. Give them the stirrup."

He was answered by a laugh from the rest, and they met the dragoons, evading their charge, and circling round man to man.

In another moment the hussars uttered a shout of triumph, as they saw their four champions close in each on his man, set the heavy horses rearing by an artful poke with the saber, and then get close under the heavies, stirrup to stirrup.

Then—how it happened no one could see—but all four of the heavies tumbled off their horses with a crash, on the opposite side to the four hussars, falling on their heads, their horses running loose, and in another moment the four champions had leaped down and held their swords at the throats of their foes, crying:

"Surrender! surrender!"

Count Pollmeyer lay still, and made no reply, for he had been stunned by the fall, but McMoriis's foe called out:

"Don't thrust, I surrender."

Then Ziethen strode up, saying:

"They are beaten fairly. But how did you do that trick? And these fellows are only recruits. Where did you learn to ride?"

O'Donovan and O'Donohue stared at him, not understanding German, but McMoriis replied:

"These men are old fox-hunters, colonel. One of them was a huntsman in Ireland, the other a groom. We call that the Galway stirrup trick, and you see it has made its mark."

CHAPTER X.

IN THE THEATER.

LATE that evening the fashionables of Berlin were listening to Voltaire's tragedy of *Macbeth*, at the court theater, and the king had set the example of applause at the closing scene of the fourth act, when there arose, in the stalls of the pit, a slight disturbance, connected with some officers, sitting there in full uniform.

Two of them were the hirsute fury of the Hussars, and carried their tall plumed shakos on their knees, while the others, who were all round them, showed by their cuirasses and bright sashettes, that they belonged to the Life Guards.

They sat in a part of the pit sacred, from long prescription, to the officers of the body-guard; and all round them the space was equally well known as reserved by custom for the wives and daughters of the nobility of Berlin, who were naturally fond of flirting with the officers.

The two hussars had been sitting there from the beginning of the piece, and, both being very good-looking young fellows, while the beauty of their uniform was more remarkable from the rarity with which it was seen there, had produced quite a little flutter among the ladies in the vicinity.

Of course the reader needs not to be told who the two hussars were, for the red mustache of one and the blonde hair of the other announced the "two Macs" sufficiently.

All had gone quietly during the first and second acts, though our friends perceived that many scowls were cast toward them.

The presence of the king, however, prevented any open outbreak, till Maurice McMahon, obeying with some surprise an arch fan signal from a very pretty little Berliner, left his own seat, at the close of the second act, to take an empty place beside the pretty lady, who immediately whispered:

"Are not you the two hussars of the British, that we have all heard of?"

"I fancy we are, mademoiselle."

"I thought so. You must not think me rude and bold in beckoning you; but—"

"Ah, mademoiselle, what could I think of you but as an angel of kindness that took pity on two lonely strangers?"

The young lady smiled and went on:

"But my mother is here beside me, and she will tell you that, in the king's presence, any lady may speak to an officer of the army. Tell me, why do the guardsmen scowl at you so?"

"I fancy because they failed to take us today."

"It is more than that. Have you not done some act to enrage them?"

Then she turned to a fat placid lady beside her.

"Mamma, this gentleman can tell you what you wish to know."

The elder lady turned her china blue eyes on McMahon with a look of languid interest, saying:

"Can you tell me, monsieur, what happened to the Count Pollmeyer to day? I am his mother, and this young lady is his sister! We are very curious to hear, for we can get nothing out of the count, yet he looks like a thundercloud. You are in the Guards, I suppose."

"No, madame."

Maurice fidgeted and felt embarrassed. He did not know what to tell the old lady, and in a sudden fit of inspiration continued:

"My comrade, Monsieur McMoriis can tell you better than I, perhaps."

"Monsieur McMoriis will be welcome," said the old lady graciously; and McMahon backed out, whispering to McMoriis, as he took his seat by his comrade:

"Thunder and turf! it's the old Countess Pollmeyer, and that's his sister. They want to know what ails the count. Quick, Maurice, ye're a better liar than I am. Make up a story and do your best to please them. Holy Moses, if Pollmeyer comes in, there'll be trouble in camp."

McMorris, while his comrade had been talking to the ladies, noticed that the officers of the Guards scowled and whispered to each other.

As he rose from his own seat to go over, he had to run the gauntlet of a positive glare from every man he passed, but he managed to keep up an air of perfect tranquillity, and took his seat by the old lady, who immediately began:

"You are Monsieur Mark Meritz?"

"McMorris, madame."

"It is a curious name. You are Bohemian?"

"No, madame. Irish."

The old lady looked surprised.

"Irish! What is that? Oh yes, I have heard of them. But tell me, monsieur, do you know my son, Count Pollmeyer?"

"I have met him, madame."

"Have you seen him to-day?"

"Yes, madame."

"Was he hurt at any time?"

Here the young lady interposed, and McMoriis could see that she was very pretty indeed:

"No, mamma, no. He was not hurt, or we should have seen it."

"Be quiet, Bertha. These young people think they know everything, monsieur. I think he was hurt, and is hiding it from us."

Maurice hesitated as to an answer, and while he hesitated, a voice from the next row of seats in the rear said quietly:

"Maurice is mistaken. The count was not hurt. I saw the whole affair."

The countess turned round and saw the uniform of the Life Guard, in the person of a young officer, who continued:

"It all happened from arresting two impudent hussars, whom the count was compelled to chastise for rudeness. He was a little out of temper naturally, and he may have shown it at home."

Here Bertha Pollmeyer blushed deeply and said in a hurried way:

"Oh I'm sure you must be mistaken, Baron Kapp. My brother was officer of the day at the palace, and not likely to have anything to do with hussars."

McMorris interposed, before the guardsman could answer, and observed:

"Mademoiselle is right. The count was attached to his majesty during the day, and whatever he did was done in obedience to orders. The count may have looked a little out of temper, madame, because of losing a bet with the colonel of our regiment, Baron Ziethen, that is all."

"A bet? On what?" asked the old lady relieved.

"Ob a mere matter of military opinion," said McMoriis indifferently.

Then seeing that the guardsmen were still glaring at him more ferociously than before, he added:

"The count was not to blame, but he had very clumsy followers to back him; that was all."

He heard the guardsman behind him draw in his breath over his clenched teeth as he said this; but the ringing of the curtain on the fourth act stopped the conversation, and he remained by Mademoiselle Pollmeyer, at a quiet signal from her, through the act, till the curtain dropped again.

Then glancing round, he saw McMahon in close conversation with one of the guardsmen, and he almost immediately heard the words, aloud:

"I forbid you to say it, sir."

"I shall say it when I please, sir. We four took four guardsmen prisoners fairly."

"It is false, sir."

"You are a blockhead, sir."

And then in another moment came a warning "hush hush" from all over the pit, followed by a dead silence, while every one glanced up at the blue curtains of the king's box, between which the majesty of Prussia could be descried, as Frederick sat scanning the theater with his glasses.

The words might not have attracted the notice of the king; but the bush did, and he turned his glance that way, and spied the two hussars.

He smiled and turned to his Adjutant Wintersfeldt.

"I had forgotten those fellows. I promised them orders to-night. You were looking for men to execute that reconnaissance. There they are. Send 'em in the order to-morrow morning. Their names are McMoriis and McMahon."

Wintersfeldt bowed and took down the names, and the king continued to look down into the

The Mad Hussars.

pit, where he could see, from the silence and constraint, no less than from the angry faces of those present, that some trouble was going on, and quickly divined its cause, from the parties brought together there.

He had not been informed of the particulars of the short contest in the riding school of the Third Hussars, and attributed the jealousy to the fact that the two Irishmen had escaped the dragoons so neatly, so he said to Winterfeldt:

"Where is Pollmeyer?"

"The count was taken ill this afternoon, sire, and Baron Kroningen is performing his duties."

"Ill, indeed? What was the matter?"

"I do not know, sire, but the doctor excused him."

"Indeed. Well, send Kroningen down to those hot-headed young fools there. There will be a quarrel, else. Tell the guardsmen that it is my order that any man quarreling with a hussar shall be put under arrest at once."

Winterfeldt retired, and very soon the king saw the tall form of an officer, whose sash proclaimed his duty passing down the center aisle of the pit and speaking to some of the guardsmen, who immediately became quiet and indifferent in their demeanor.

But McMahon, who had been engaged in the trouble with the hot-headed guardsman, heard his next neighbor whisper under his breath:

"King's order or no, you said 'blockhead,' and, if you dare sustain it, meet me at Domenico's after the play."

"And where's that?" asked McMahon, coolly.

The guard-man immediately became polite.

"I shall take pleasure in showing it to you, if it is understood we fight."

"Fight!" echoed McMahon. "My dear friend, did ye ever know an Irishman that would say no to such a chance! I'll go with the best of pleasure. And were ye scowling all this time at that now?"

"No, monsieur," the guardsman replied more placably, "but you must understand that the honor of the corps is involved."

"The honor! How!"

"It seems that Count Pollmeyer and his men were very clumsy to-day, and have disgraced the body-guards by yielding to hussars. It is therefore necessary, for the honor of the Guards, that we should be able, if any one venture to cast jokes at us for being defeated by light cavalry in the persons of your champions, to say, 'Very good, but we killed them all!'"

McMahon turned his head and looked at the young man keenly.

"D'ye mean to say you're going to try and kill us all at once?" he asked.

"Certainly, monsieur. You must see that we have no other resort," replied the guardsman coolly.

"But how many of ye propose to set on us?"

"Set on you, monsieur! We are not assassins."

"Well, how many then?"

"All of us here, monsieur; one after the other, but only two at a time. You will have to fight our whole regiment. That's all."

McMahon curled his mustache.

"Is that all? And where are we to fight?"

"In Domenico's museum. The students have their duels there and no one will notice us, if we go there."

"A very pretty plan," observed McMahon in the driest of tones. "Ye've made up your mind to kill us, haven't ye?"

"Certainly, monsieur. You can see that it is necessary for the honor of the corps."

"And how about the honor of the hussars?"

The guardsman shrugged his shoulders.

"That is not our affair. They can take care of their own honor, I suppose."

"Be assured they will," returned Maurice more gravely than his wont. "At what hour will you expect us at Domenico's?"

"Half an hour after the fall of the curtain. If you wish to bring any of your comrades we shall be happy to entertain them, but if you do not come you know the consequences."

"I do not."

The guardsman smiled sarcastically.

"You'll find them disagreeable. In Berlin we believe in personal responsibility, and the man who will not fight for his corps is soon made to feel it."

"I understand you, monsieur. Well, be assured the Third Hussars will fight."

And then the curtain rose on the fifth act, stopping conversation once more, and McMahon had time to glance over at McMorris, who seemed to have ingratiated himself with the Polymeyers to a wonderful degree, for the young lady was whispering to him during most of the act, and when the curtain fell it was McMorris who escorted the two ladies to their own carriage outside, while McMahon heard the countess say:

"The officers of your regiment will always be welcome at our house, monsieur. Baron Zieten is an old friend of my late husband, General Pollmeyer, and I hope to see you and your friend soon."

McMorris drew back, bowing profoundly, as Bertha Pollmeyer kissed her hand to him from the carriage, and McMahon took his arm and whispered:

"Come, we've no time to waste philandering around party girls. Come with me."

McMorris saw that something was the matter with his friend, so he went off with him at a rapid pace toward the barracks, asking:

"What has happened?"

"Not much, only we've got to fight the whole regiment of the Guards to-night. That's all."

"Fight a regiment? Nonsense."

"Ye may say that. Nonsense. But we've got to do it, or be posted for cowardice."

And he gave McMorris a short outline of his conversation with the bumptious guardsman, adding:

"They're to meet us at Domenico's. Where the devil it is I don't know, but I'm thinking if we two go in there alone, it'll be just sheer murder. So let's pay a visit to the barracks, and call up the rest of the cadets. Sure they can't help fighting for the honor of the corps and we'll have a chance."

McMorris shook his head.

"They'd be out, all over the city. We can't place any dependence on them. If we are to do anything it must be done by Irishman alone. Let us find Major Carroll. He will ensure us fair play."

"True for ye, Maurice. We'll find him at once. Ah, if they'd only give us O'Donovan and O'Donohue, I'd not fear the best of them."

"May be we'll be able, McMahon. I've a plan to get them in. Come along and I'll tell ye on the road."

CHAPTER XI.

DOMENICO'S.

"Domenico's" as it was generally called, but, more fully, "Domenico's Winter Garden for the Nobility," was, as its name implied, a resort kept by an Italian called Domenico. It was renowned for two things: beer, and duels. Domenico did not make the beer, but he bought the best in Germany and sold it in a garden roofed over with glass, where he kept a band playing most of the night, and, being an Italian, was careful to have good music for his guests.

Domenico's music was celebrated throughout Berlin, and the officers of the army following the king's tastes, professed themselves fond of the melodies of Paiscillo, while they made no pretense at all of their liking for the beer. And it was the beer which produced in most cases, the second article for which the Winter Garden was famous—that is, the duels.

Beer, in sufficient quantities, produces loud talking and swaggering; which, among young men who habitually wear swords, produces counterswaggering, and is apt to result in challenges to try conclusions with the swords.

The etiquette of arms in Prussia compelled officers to appear in public in full uniform at all times, and full uniform means, side-arms, as well as gold lace.

Then, wherever the officers went, the students of the military schools were sure to follow, and they esteemed it a mark of honor to fight as many duels as possible.

It was estimated by a competent person that the crop of duels at Domenico's averaged at least twenty a week; yet, strange to say, the details never leaked out, and the police never visited Domenico's, while a stranger, entering the place, would never have dreamed that it was the fighting ground of the city.

The fact was that the etiquette of Domenico's prevented any notice being taken of a quarrel; and when it reached the point of a duel, the men engaged always became excessively polite, and invited each other merely to "inspect Signor Domenico's collection in the museum."

The "museum" was really the dueling-room, which was situated in an extensive cellar, where the beer was kept, and in the midst of which a space about forty feet square, surrounded by tiers of hogsheads, was reserved for the "little entertainments," of which alone any one at Domenico's made mention.

Its character of "museum" arose from a collection of rusty weapons of all ages, hung up on the stone pillars that were planted round the central space, and it was the fashion to inspect these before a duel, and talk about everything else but fighting, till the principals were stripped and ready for work.

On the evening of the little trouble at the theater, Domenico's—above ground—was blue with the smoke of several hundred pipes, and crowded with officers and students drinking beer.

The cuirasses of the guards, the tall shakos of hussars, the white and gold peaks of the grenadiers, were to be seen here and there, while the colored caps of the different student corps showed that the boys were on hand as usual to take lessons of their elders.

Some were singing, all were talking loudly, regardless of the rest, while the band was mustering for a symphony on the platform at one end of the garden, in the midst of a green bower of foliage.

The tables were set round on a smooth stone pavement, and orange-trees, set in big tubs of earth, were scattered here and there to give a tropical aspect to the Winter Garden.

A stranger would have noticed nothing very unusual, but the smart students said to each other in whispers:

"There will be a heavy inspection of the museum to-night. Look at the guardsmen—how they stick together! and the hussars are getting into a group."

Then they set to work to count, and one said:

"The hussars will be exterminated. There are only eleven of them, and every officer of the guards is out. Four squadrons against one is not fair."

The hussars, in fact, looked grave and rather worried. There were four officers and seven cadets present, at whom the guardsmen were sneering and scowling, twisting their mustaches and making covert flings, which the light horsemen appeared to resent, but not to be able to give back as yet.

"I told you, gentlemen," said a cornet of the Guards to his neighbor, speaking loudly, "that the story was all nonsense. The leap from the bridge was all very well; we know the hussars are good at running away. But this stuff about Pollmeyer being taken a prisoner is all false. Trust a hussar to run from a guardsman, and invent stories about it to cover his defeat."

"It's pretty clear that the two gentlemen of the theater have taken the hint," added another. "It is now eleven, and they have not made their appearance. They are prudent."

This speech seemed to irritate the hussars greatly; but not one of them spoke, for it was against etiquette for the member of one corps to speak to a member of another until the time for "inspection of the museum" arrived.

The guardsmen were still boasting away to each other, when one of the hussars, who was looking anxiously at the door, cried out:

"Hurrah! gentlemen, I see the shakos of the Third Hussars, Zieten's pets, who trounced the stupid dragoons so nicely to-day. Did you hear the story? They say Pollmeyer was so mortified that he has taken to his bed. Here they come. Long live the Mad Hussars!"

And the little group burst into a cheer and rushed off to the entrance of the garden, where they perceived the tall shakos of four more of their comrades, coming in.

But as they drew closer, they seemed to be surprised, for along with the four hussars was a gigantic officer of the Guards, arm in arm with the two foremost, and quite evidently on terms of friendship.

The hussars recoiled and scowled, whispering to each other:

"A reconciliation! Disgraceful! It must not be. We could never survive it."

They were set on having a fight.

But the four other hussars came on, and as they came still closer, it was seen that the two foremost were cornets, while the other two were common troopers, which was decidedly against etiquette, cadets being the lowest rank allowed by custom at Domenico's.

The big officer of Guards was well known all over Berlin as Major Balikaro, who had fought so many duels in his first year in the city that no one had dared to challenge him ever since.

He nodded familiarly to the hussars and said, as he passed on with his friends:

"It's all right, gentlemen. There will be a little entertainment presently, but not of the kind you expect. Fall in behind me."

Then he stalked on to the group of guardsmen, who all stood up as he came, and one of them called out, jocularly:

"Good-evening, major. I see you've taken some more prisoners. Come and let's drink a toast to the courage of the Hussars."

Major Balikaro dropped the arms of his two friends, drew himself up to his full height, and answered gravely:

"Baron Kapp, you are mistaken. These officers are my friends and countrymen. Any person who insults them insults me."

Baron Kapp looked crestfallen, but sneered:

"Oh, well, if the gentlemen have taken refuge under your wing, they are prudent. You are the superior of all here, and must be obeyed, I suppose. But you know what is the story afloat."

"I know it well, but what of it? Are you aware, gentlemen, that we expect a campaign in such short order that we cannot afford to cut each others' throats?"

"The major grows prudent with the first gray hairs," said a smooth-faced officer; "but he cannot deny that the honor of the heavy horse cannot remain sullied while it is possible to wash it. I propose an inspection of the museum."

"The museum shall be inspected," returned the big major, calmly: "but it must be understood, first, that there is no unfair advantage to be taken. I am responsible for the honor of the Guard before any of you young gentlemen. Therefore I say that, if the museum is to be inspected, only two of you shall go down, in company with these gentlemen."

There was an instant murmur.

"No, no; we are all concerned. All will go."

"Then, gentlemen, it will be only fair to invite our friends of the Third to come with us."

"Certainly," answered Kapp, readily, "they

are all expected to come. The more the merrier."

"And only an equal number of ours follow," the major added, firmly.

Again there was a negative murmur, at which the gigantic major looked sternly round.

"I say only an equal number; otherwise, I do what has not been done before—order you to your quarters at once and clear the garden."

The hot-headed guardsmen grumbled loudly, but ended in obeying, and Balikaro led the way down-stairs through a private staircase at the end of the Winter Garden, through a doorway which was guarded by a student, who let them pass at the magic words:

"General inspection to-night."

They went down a narrow, winding flight of stone steps and entered an immense cellar, the roof supported by stone vaulting, with short, sturdy pillars at the spring of each vault, the floor covered with soft white sand, of which the whole Berlin plain is composed.

To dig a cellar costs less in such a soil than elsewhere, but demands good side walls to keep the sand from caving in.

The Winter Garden cellars were estimated to hold at least twenty thousand barrels of beer packed close, though the usual stock was only ten, the yearly consumption being about two, so that all the beer drank was at least five years old, if the supply were properly kept up. This cellar was dimly lighted along the streets of beer barrels, but a central square was quite brilliant with the flames of more than twenty lanterns with reflectors, all casting their beams on the dueling ground of white sand, on which were already two dark spots soaked into the sand.

"A couple of students with back swords, probably," said one of the guardsmen, inspecting the dark patches; "it is amazing how those boys bleed, isn't it?"

"Come, gentlemen," cried the Irish major, "it is time for our little entertainment. Here are two Irish officers, friends of mine, who desire the pleasure of meeting any two here."

"And here are my first pair," said Baron Kapp, who seemed to be the spokesman of the Guards.

As he said so, out stepped two officers and began to strip off their cuirasses and coats for the duel.

Balikaro put up his hand.

"Pardon me one moment. I act as a sort of umpire for both sides, gentlemen. How do you propose to conduct this entertainment?"

"As you please," answered Kapp. "I say let the first pair play, and, if the men are unable to proceed, let a second pair take the place of the beaten ones, and so on till all have played."

"Then you mean that my men are to play all of yours till they are tired?"

"Certainly, major. They are the gentlemen who have boasted that they took guardsmen prisoners one to one. They must make good their boast."

Balikaro smiled.

"You mistake. Neither has said a word till it was forced out of them. Moreover, they are not alone. I am told they had four champions to-day. Here they are. Two of them are troopers. If you propose to play a dozen against two, you must take the men as well as the officers."

The guardsman murmured:

"No, no—against etiquette."

"Etiquette be hang'd! It is play or pay here. If the gentlemen of the Guards fear to meet common hussars, the honor of the Guard will be indeed tarnished—I say it, who belong to the Guard."

Kapp seemed stung by the taunt.

"Very well; let them into the play, gentlemen," he cried. "After all, this matter must be settled; and till it is settled for good, we shall have no peace in Berlin. The ladies will laugh at us. Who will put these vaunting hussars into a hole?"

"I," and "I," and "I," cried several voices.

Kapp chose two of the biggest officers, and in a few minutes more eight men faced each other, sword in hand, in the cellar.

It was understood that any man who could disable his antagonist quickly could help his neighbor, and the weapons adopted by all were the long broadswords of the Guards; for there was no equality between them and the curved sabers of the Hussars, and the guardsmen would not use the latter.

The spectators drew off and watched the men advance, interest being concentrated on the two private hussars, who had not said a word all the evening.

No sooner were the swords crossed than O'Donohue and O'Donovan leaped back—a proceeding that elicited a loud hiss of scorn from the guardsmen, who fancied the men were afraid and retreating.

This feeling vanished when they saw the two Irishmen grasp their long blades in both hands like clubs, and begin to dance about, humming softly to themselves some strange melody, while they hovered round their foes.

The guardsmen seemed to be puzzled by the maneuver, for they were used only to fighting

with swords crossed, feeling the edge constantly.

The two Macs adopted the same tactics—leaving their adversaries' blades, though they did not try any two-handed work on their own weapons; and the four guardsmen looked puzzled at the unusual way of fighting, to which they were not accustomed.

Then, all of a sudden, O'Donovan uttered a wild Irish yell, skipped round his adversary, and, by exposing his legs, invited a cut at them.

No sooner was it made than he leaped up in the air over the sword, and at the same moment cut full at his adversary's head, laying it open with a long slash that brought the guardsmen to the earth, bleeding profusely.

"Erin go bragh! Whoop!" yelled O'Donovan, and in another moment the fight became as lively as a new Donnybrook fair; for the wild Irishman danced round from one pair to another, helping his friends; so that, in less than fifty seconds by the watch, four officers of the Guards, more or less severely wounded, lay helpless on the sand, and the four Irish champions united in a yell of triumph, as if the fight had warmed their blood, even the usually quiet Maurice catching the infection, and waving his sword defiantly at the gloomy group of guardsmen, crying:

"Hussars forever! A hussar can beat any dragoon that ever stepped."

But the first defeat only seemed to enrage the remaining guardsmen more.

They had been standing by, keenly watching the fight, studying their adversaries' play, and Kapp now called out:

"The next four forward and attack boldly. You must close in on them. They are good on the attack, but have no defense."

The second quartette of guardsmen accordingly rushed in, not giving the champions time to rest from the first assault, and a furious contest ensued, the combatants fighting all round the inclosure, O'Donovan and O'Donohue yelling and jumping, but getting confused as they went, while the two Macs kept cool. The result of this second contest was decided by McMorris, who was easily the best swordsman there.

By a sudden slash he laid open the face of his antagonist, who staggered back and fell, when the active Irishman leaped to the assistance of O'Donovan just as the latter was failing, and disabled his foe by a cut in the leg, after which the two remaining guardsmen were quickly overpowered and laid bleeding on the sand.

Then Balikaro strode into the arena, calling out in his thundering voice:

"Enough blood has been spilt. As the senior officer present, I forbid any further fighting. The honor of the Guards is satisfied, and if any gentleman wishes further trouble he will have to deal with me. D'ye mind that now?"

The guardsmen stood scowling and hesitating, while the four hussars, who had fought such a desperate contest, stood panting for breath and almost unable to realize their own success.

Then Baron Kapp said to Balikaro, sullenly:

"You are my superior officer and must be obeyed, I suppose; but our time of reckoning will come yet. The Guards will not stay beaten."

McMorris, who heard him, came forward, and stood by Balikaro.

"May I be allowed a word to these gentlemen?" he said quietly. "There is a mistake here."

Kapp looked surprised but bowed stiffly.

"Speak, monsieur," he said.

"I will. In the first place, gentlemen, we of the Hussars, have not sought this quarrel, and not one of us has repeated the incident of to-day to any third person. In the second place, I see a much better way of settling the question of superiority than a duel here."

"How, how?" asked several.

"While we quarrel, the king loses soldiers. Let us see who will go furthest in the first battle, in which we are engaged. That will settle the question forever."

"But when shall we have the battle?" asked Kapp, sneering. "It is well to put off the test, but you cannot escape us thus. We are at peace now, and unless you can name your day of battle I shall think you are afraid to go on."

Balikaro raised his hand.

"One moment, baron. I will answer that question. You ask when we shall have a battle? That I cannot say exactly; but this I know: Orders to prepare for active service have reached Colonel Seidlitz to-night, and to-morrow all leaves of absence will be recalled. That is why I stopped this duel. I am not ambitious to report half my officers as sick at the beginning of a campaign. Moreover, I wish to say another thing. In coming here to-night, these gentlemen have put themselves in serious peril: for they are ordered off to-morrow morning on secret service. Had either of them been wounded to-night, we could not have hidden the facts from his majesty, and you know what would have been the result. That's all."

His address seemed to excite and surprise the guardsmen greatly, and Kapp cried out:

"Are you in earnest, major? Is there to be a real campaign at last?"

"I have every reason to believe it, to-morrow."

"Then what fools we've been," cried a young guardsman. "Eight men not fit to go out, and a campaign approaching."

Balikaro smiled rather scornfully.

"Ye see the honor of the Guards was safer in my hands than your own, gentlemen. Pick up your wounded and get them healed up as soon as ye can, or the regiment will look bad on the parade."

Ten minutes later, Domenico's "museum" was deserted, and the officers and cadets of the Third Hussars were strolling home to their barracks, talking over the prowess of the four Irish champions and the coming war.

CHAPTER XII.

LOVE'S STRATEGY.

AFTER ten years of peace and economy, the little kingdom of Prussia entered suddenly into the famous Seven Years' War, in which Frederick, single handed, contended against Austria, Saxony and France, and from which he emerged in 1763, triumphant, but with a loss of men and money that nearly beggared the kingdom spite of all economies.

In the history of this war it is not our purpose to enter, save as it concerns our Irish soldiers of fortune, who were participants from beginning to close, and a very few words will tell its story.

A week after the duel in Domenico's, the whole army had left Berlin, Ziethen's Hussars scouring the advance, and so sudden was the king's attack, that he captured the whole Saxon army without firing a shot, defeated the Austrians at Lobositz and Prague, and passed the winter in the enemy's country with headquarters at Dresden.

Here the enmity between the Hussars and Guards which had slumbered during the campaign, broke out again in the form of quarrels, and the king issued an order that any officer thereafter fighting a duel, should be cashiered or reduced to the ranks at the king's option.

At the same time, to remove the temptation to quarrels, the king dispatched General Ziethen, who now commanded all the hussars of the army, to the frontiers of Bohemia, while he kept General Seidlitz, colonel of the Guards and general of the heavy cavalry at Dresden with the court for the winter.

It was during this time that the two Macs, who had been promoted to lieutenants during the campaign, became involved in an adventure which was to affect their future career in the army very sensibly, and led to their title of the "Mad Hussars" being famous throughout Prussia and Europe.

They were quartered with the same squadron on one of the slopes of the Erz Gebirge Mountains, in a medieval castle partially fallen to ruins, and celebrated for its legends.

Time hung heavy on their hands that winter, for the Austrians were not nearer than twenty miles, and could not be coaxed into an attack, while the country around was almost bare of inhabitants, save a few wood-cutters in the forests that clothed it.

There were no other officers with them, and their party consisted of about seventy-five hussars, whose duties consisted in daily and nightly patrolling the forest, especially on a post-road that was said to run from Berlin to Vienna, though no one was ever seen on it since the fighting had begun.

One evening the two Macs were sitting in the gloomy hall of the old castle, moodily watching the wood fire burning in the huge fireplace, when McMorris observed, with a sigh:

"D'ye remember the Countess Bertha, Maurice?"

McMahon looked up.

"Countess Bertha? No. Who is she?"

McMorris colored slightly.

"Count Pollmeyer's sister, I mean, the pretty little lady that talked so kindly to us in the theater."

"No, I don't. Surely we've no call to be thinking of pretty ladies in this dog-hole of a place."

McMahon looked round with another sigh.

"Ye may say that. Dog-hole indeed. But, Maurice, ye didn't know I was corresponding with her, did ye now?"

McMahon stared at him incredulously.

"Corresponding with her! Why, man, ye've only seen her once, and her brother hates you like poison."

"I know it, and perhaps that's the very reason we took to each other, for surely there's no deceiving myself in that now. D'ye mind the time we met in the theater?"

"I do well. Ye made play with a vengeance, it seems, after I gave ye the chance."

"And why wouldn't I? The honor of Ireland was at stake, and I was forced to do it."

"But how came ye to correspond?"

"Easy enough. Ye remember the count was hurt at Lobositz, and I had the good fortune to help him after the Saxon dragoons had him down!"

McMahon looked proudly at his friend.

"Ay, ay, I remember. Ye cut down three of them."

"Never mind," interrupted McMorris, hastily. "I didn't speak of it to boast, but between you and me, it was that incident which opened the affair."

McMahon leaned over eagerly.

"Affair? Did ye say affair? Maurice McMorris, when an Irishman uses that word he can only mane one of two things—a duel or a girl."

McMorris flushed deeper than before.

"Now, don't ye, don't ye, Maurice. Are ye not well aware that the bloom on a peach must not be rubbed off, or it ruins the fruit? Ye shouldn't talk so broadly. It's not a duel."

McMahon held out his hand.

"Me dear boy, count on me for silence. Tell me the story. I'll help ye, no matter what the risk. Ye love the lady?"

"I adore her," said Maurice simply, "but I might as well hope for the moon. It's the only secret I ever kept from ye, Mac, and I can't keep it any more. I must confide in ye and ask your advice."

"Stop a minute," answered his friend. "Stop a minute. Bedad, when a man asks me advice, I must put on me thinking cap. Whisht till I get ready."

He got up and fetched out a bottle of country brandy, and mixed himself a jorum of punch before he said another word.

Then he pulled out a short black pipe from his coat pocket, filled and lighted it, after taking a swig of the punch, after all which he said:

"Help yourself, and fire away, Mac."

McMahon shook his head.

"I don't want to drink, but I'll tell ye the story if ye like."

"I'm waiting for it."

"I told ye Lobositz was the cause of the affair. It happened thus. Ye know how mortified the count was at being saved by us, but he's a gentleman if he is a Dutchman, and after he got to Berlin he wrote to me while he was convalescing, to thank me for saving his life."

"That was decent; but how did he write? His arm was broken."

"That was the beginning of the affair. It seems his sister was his amanuensis."

McMahon took out his pipe to interject:

"And a mighty nice clerk, too. Go on, Maurice."

"And very naturally she added a line of her own at the end to tell me that same."

"Devil blame her. And what did ye do?"

"What would ye have done yourself?"

"I'd have maintained the honor of Ireland, ye may be sure, McMorris, if the lady put any address in the letter."

"She did," said McMorris.

"Then, bedad, if ye didn't write back to her, you're a softer-headed fool than I take ye for, Mr. McMorris."

"Well, I wrote to her."

"And what did ye say?"

"Never mind. But the best of it was that I got an answer from her."

"Ye did—really?"

"I did."

"And what about the count? Does he know it?"

"No."

"Then there'll be trouble when he does, McMorris," said McMahon, dryly.

"I'm aware of that."

Then ensued a long silence, when the red man of Munster pursued:

"Well, what d'ye want to tell me and ask me? Ye haven't done yet, surely?"

"I have not."

"I thought not."

"No. The fact is—she's coming here."

McMahon started up, amazed.

"Coming here? Man, you're mad."

"No, I'm not. Sit down and I'll tell ye."

McMahon puffed vigorously at his pipe as he sat down again, staring at McMorris as if he did not know what to make of him.

"She is coming here—that is to say not to this very castle, but by this road to Vienna."

"And what the devil brings a lady to this part of the country alone?"

"I didn't say she was alone."

McMahon gave a sigh of relief.

"Why didn't ye say so at first?"

"I thought I did."

"Ye didn't then."

"I suppose I forgot it."

"Ye may say that. The fact is, White Maurice, ye're out of your head; ye're spoony; ye're not accountable for your actions, since you're in love. Now tell us what it's all about. What's the Countess Bertha doing out here? Who's coming with her?"

"Her brother of course."

"And what makes him bring his sister here?"

"He's not bringing her here at all."

"Then who is?"

Maurice McMorris looked round to see no one was within hearing and then whispered:

"The Princess Amelia."

McMahon looked not only astonished—but for a man of his fearless temperament—almost afraid.

The love affair of the princess with the daringly romantic and imprudent Baron Trenck had been the talk of Europe for a long time;

and it was also known that the baron was confined in the fortress of Gratz in Bohemia, about fifty miles to the north of the castle where our two friends were sitting now.

"The Princess Amelia!" he cried. "Good heavens, man, are ye going into intrigue as well as love? What's she doing here?"

McMorris laid his finger on his lips.

"Hush! speak low. I will tell you. Yes, it is as you suspect. The Princess Amelia has planned to come hither in disguise, to hold an interview with Trenck if possible, and to plan his escape. The Countess Bertha is her maid of honor, and we two have laid the plan to help two lovers to become happy."

McMorris listened with unwonted gravity.

"White Maurice," he said dryly, "d'ye know what I think of all this plotting?"

McMorris drew himself up rather haughtily.

"There's no plotting, Red Maurice. It's not in the interest of the enemy: only a love affair."

"White Maurice, what d'ye know of this love affair of the princess and Trenck?"

"I know that they met and loved each other, ten years ago, and that the cruel king parted them, on the pretense that Trenck corresponded with his uncle, the Austrian Trenck. I know that even the very jailers of that unhappy man respect and love him, and I know that if I can help him, I will."

McMahon puffed slowly at his pipe in silence for a full minute before answering.

"D'ye feel sure of all this?"

"I do, Red Maurice."

They had become accustomed to calling each other and O'Donohue and O'Donovan by the name of "Maurice" with the prefix describing complexion, so that "White," "Red," "Black" and "Brown Maurice" meant respectively McMorris, McMahon, O'Donovan and O'Donohue.

"And ye think the Princess Amelia will come here to see her lover, who is confined at Gratz fifty miles from here?"

"I know it."

"Then how the devil are they going to meet each other, I'd like to know?"

McMorris looked round apprehensively.

"Trenck, the uncle, will surprise the castle."

McMahon started up.

"And ye mane to say the Princess Amelia's privy to a plot to give up a Prussian fortress to an Austrian colonel for the sake of a lover?"

McMorris shook his head.

"Not quite so bad. That is where woman's wit is to come in. It seems that Baron Franz Trenck of Austria was to hover round Gratz, which is on the frontier, and to make the commandant there think that his prisoner was in danger, induce him to order the removal of Trenck to a fortress nearer to Berlin."

McMahon tugged at his mustache thoughtfully as Maurice paused.

"Well, man, well!"

"And the road to that fortress leads by this castle, so that it is probable that we shall have to furnish the escort to the prisoner."

"And what then? D'ye mean we're to let him escape, Lieutenant McMorris?"

McMahon's tone was harsh and stern, while his eye began to blaze as he added:

"Because if ye do, ye're mistaken in me, sir. It's but little the McMahons of Munster have in the world, but none of them ever deserted his post or sold his duty for love or money."

McMorris waited till his friend had finished.

"I said nothing about letting him escape. I said only that if we chose to wink at it, we might give the poor little princess an interview with the man she loves. Were ye never in love, Red Maurice?"

McMahon looked quizzically at his friend.

"In love? Dozens of times. But I never let it run away with my wits."

McMorris made an impatient motion.

"I see I shall have to tell you the whole story."

"Ye'd better, if there's more coming. At present I must decline to enter into any such mad scheme."

"What mad scheme? I've proposed none yet."

"You've hinted at one."

"Well, now, I'll tell you just what I've promised to do."

"Oh! you've promised already, have ye?"

"Yes; you would have done the same if she had asked you as she did me. You can help me or not, as you please, but I swear I'm going to perform all I have promised, if I have to desert the Prussian service."

McMahon looked gravely at his friend.

"I'm sorry ye said that."

"Why?"

"Because it leaves me only one resource."

"And what is that?"

"To follow ye anywhere. Ye don't think Maurice McMahon would desert a countryman in distress?"

McMorris grasped his hand cordially.

"I knew you'd say it. But reassnre yourself I do not intend to lead you into disgrace. I'll tell you the whole plan. As a matter of fact, Trenck will come here to morrow, under guard, and be turned over to us without its being supposed that we or any one here knows who he is.

He will be confined to a room in the wing of the castle, for about three days, during which we are to have charge of him. In the mean time the Princess Amelia is to make a secret journey hither, accompanied by her two maids of honor and Count Pollmeyer, who is to manage the whole affair."

McMahon interrupted him eagerly.

"Did ye say two maids of honor?"

"Yes; the other is Countess Hildegarde Bremer."

"Is she purty?"

"So Countess Bertha says."

"Say no more, my boy. I'm with ye to the death. There's a maid of honor a piece for us, and when ye show that bait to an Irishman, ye catch him every time."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PRISONER.

The very next day after this, Red Maurice McMahon took out a patrol through the forest toward the next post, (another castle of the same dilapidated style as their own, while McMorris remained at Konigstein as their fortress was named.

McMahon had received from his friend full instructions as to what was to happen, and had taken with him Maurice O'Donovan, who by this time was beginning to learn a good deal of German. They took with them twenty hussars and rode out some miles toward the Austrian lines before turning toward their friends.

It was important to find out if the enemy were as passive as usual, or whether they expected any movement in the Prussian lines.

When they reached the summit of a hill from which they would usually see with a glass the extreme Austrian outposts, McMorris was struck with the fact that the enemy were unusually careless.

He could see a picket of hussars, with their horses unsaddled, the men resting round a fire, and the usual mounted vedette had given place to a man on foot, who sat at the base of a tree and appeared to be smoking a pipe.

"Bedad," he muttered, "there's a fine chance to make a dash and wake those fellows up, if I've a mind to; but what good would it do? Sure we needn't hurt each other till the battle's about something."

He left a vedette to watch, with orders to follow him if anything alarming took place, and then rode away through bridle-paths in the forest, till he came to the spot where his pickets joined those of the next squadron of his regiment, whose head-quarters were at the castle of Koboldstein.

Here he met the officer of the next post, a Lieutenant named Weimar, and asked him:

"Any thing stirring?"

"Nothing. Everything is as quiet as a church. What fools we were not to keep quiet at Dresden. We might be dancing at the court balls. You know the queen has come on to join his majesty, don't you?"

"No. Who told you?"

"A letter from Fritz Schlagenhammer, brother to our quartermaster. Ah he's a lucky fellow. He's detailed with the magazines at Dresden, and not forced to live like a wild beast, as we are."

"And what does he say?"

"That the queen has gone to Dresden; but the Princess Amelia refused to come, preferring to remain at Berlin. You know she's been moping ever since that Trenck affair—"

"Hush, Weimar! Forbidden subject, you know."

"I know it," grumbled Weimar in French "but the men don't understand us, so we can talk, and my faith, Mackmarn, I care not who knows it, we all like Trenck and wish he could escape. I remember him when he was in the Guards and a great favorite of the king. We all felt sorry for him when he was put in prison; for who can help sympathy with a pair of such lovers as Trenck and the Princess Amelia."

McMahon shrugged his shoulders.

"It's no affair of ours. He was detected in writing to the Austrians, I've heard; and if so, he deserves his punishment."

"Not so," returned Weimar eagerly. "I was there when he was arrested, and it was the general opinion that the charge was only a sulter-fuge, and that the real reason the king locked him up was because he would not promise to give up the Princess Amelia."

"Well, as I said, it is no business of ours. Have you observed any movement of the enemy?"

"I am expecting one every day, on account of their silence and apparent indifference."

"While I expect nothing of the sort—"

Even as he spoke, however, he stopped, as he cast his eyes back over his own line of vedettes; for he saw a hussar coming to meet him at a gallop, and continued:

"I may be wrong after all, for here comes

"A party from the general, my officer, with a prisoner who is going to Magdeburg."

"A prisoner?" echoed Weimar; "what kind of a prisoner? An Austrian?"

The sergeant hesitated.

"It is not for me to say, my officer; but I think it is a state prisoner."

"Why do you think so?"

"He is in a horse litter, my officer, with the curtains closed and two men ride by him with cocked pistols ready to shoot if he looks out."

Weimar uttered a cry of satisfaction as he hastily saluted McMahon and rode off.

"News at last," he cried as he waved his hand in farewell to his brother officer.

"Ay, indeed," muttered McMahon watching him. "News that would surprise ye all if ye knew it, and his majesty most of all. Surely women and gold can unlock any door on earth. Who'd have thought that gruff old Ziethen himself would have been drawn into this business?"

So much he had heard from McMorris, that the grim old general-colonel Ziethen, was in the plot with the Princess Amelia, though how much and what the plot was, neither knew exactly.

McMahon remained at the outposts with his patrol for nearly an hour, dismounting his men to rest, when he saw his friend Weimar coming back with a mounted party, in the midst of which was a horse litter, closely curtained.

The little procession was coming along the line of vedettes, and McMahon mounted his party to meet it, as it came up.

Then Weimar introduced a young cornet, who handed him some orders, which were addressed:

"To the commandant of the outpost of Schloss Konigstein."

"You are attached to that post, I believe," said the cornet politely.

"I am second in command," said McMahon. "My friend, Lieutenant McMorris, ranks me by one day through date of commission. Have ye any orders besides these?"

"Yes. I am to turn over this prisoner to you, by the colonel's order. You are to take him to Konigstein, and let no one communicate with him on the way. I have had so much trouble with his trying to talk, that I've had to threaten to shoot him if he looks out of the litter."

"Yes," cried an angry voice inside the litter, "and if you were only on an equality with me in strength, you little chicken, I'd have strangled you for your pains."

And out from between the curtains of the litter came a man's head, of great size, with long shaggy hair and huge beard.

"Go in this instant!" cried the young cornet, angrily.

"Shoot him down, men, if he refuses."

"Ay, shoot away!" cried the head, contemptuously. "It's but little I care for life. Shoot, puppy, shoot."

McMahon looked at the head with great interest. He had never seen a handsomer man, spite of the wild hair and beard.

The young cornet was obviously demoralized by the insolence of his prisoner, for he said hastily:

"I turn him over to you, lieutenant. You will be responsible for him. He is closely ironed."

"Ironed!" echoed the prisoner, with a bitter laugh. "If I were not, you'd not have kept me; not with fifty hussars. Bah! Give me my liberty and I'll fight my way out barehanded. You are all cowards, you Prussians, after all."

The cornet colored up furiously, but McMahon made a sign to him to retire, and then waved back all the men out of ear-shot, the prisoner gazing at him out of a pair of fierce dark eyes, as if wondering what he meant to do.

As McMahon approached him, he growled:

"You're not such an ass as that little cornet, but I hate red-headed men. What do you want?"

"A little civility, Monsieur Trenck," said McMahon, coldly. "I am aware you have suffered much; but that is no excuse for insolence to men who are only doing their duty."

The prisoner glared at him savagely.

"You presume to rebuke me. If I were free, you would not be so saucy."

McMahon smiled.

"On the contrary, I intend to set you free and give you a lesson in politeness some time soon. Do you know why you are coming here?"

Trenck looked at him keenly.

"Do you?"

"I do."

The prisoner's countenance cleared instantly and a charming smile replaced its scowl.

"In that case, monsieur, your name must be McMorris and I owe you an apology."

"My name is McMahon, and you owe me an apology just the same."

Trenck scowled again suspiciously.

"Then where is McMorris?"

"He commands at Konigstein. He is my friend, and I am in his confidence."

Again the prisoner's countenance cleared.

"Why didn't you say so before? Can you not see I was acting a part?" he said, hurriedly, in low tones. "I am only pretending rudeness. What shall I do now?"

"Get back into the litter, and hold your tongue. If you are recognized you will get us all into a serious scrape, on your account."

Trenck instantly drew in his head.

"I am dumb. Manage it for me as you think best, honest friend."

There was a certain air of quiet condescension in this man, a helpless manacled prisoner, that showed he considered himself vastly superior to his mean surroundings, and that roused in McMahon a mingling of respect and irritation.

To be addressed as "my honest friend" a form of speech general with inferiors, rather piqued him, but he said nothing more to Trenck, and went back to the cornet, to whom he said:

"I will be responsible for the prisoner now. Do you know who he is?"

The cornet shook his head.

"No. With all his talking he would not tell that. He was turned over to me from Gratz, the place where that villain Trenck is confined."

McMahon was a little surprised.

"Why do you call him a villain, monsieur?"

"Was he not a villain to conspire with the enemy to give up Silesia. He'll never be let out again. I only wish I had him where that fellow there is."

"Why, monsieur?"

"I'd not have taken his insolence so tamely. I fancy this fellow is a man, from his wild look, so I feel sorry for him; but Trenck is different. I think I would have shot him and his majesty would have thanked me. Well, good-day, lieutenant. I wish you joy of your maniac."

And the young cornet rode away, while McMahon set his party in motion to return to the castle of Konigstein, thinking:

"There is something very strange in all this. I do not understand what the general means by sending the prisoner here. I suppose the orders will tell, but I cannot open them, not being the commandant myself, by one day's seniority."

And for the first time in their friendship, McMahon felt a little vexed that his junior in age and experience, should have become his senior by an accident that prevented his indulging his spirit of curiosity.

However, he had no trouble with his prisoner, who remained quietly within the litter, and when the party arrived at Konigstein, they were rather surprised to find a heavy traveling carriage standing in the ruinous court yard, while Count Max Pollmeyer, in civilian dress, his arm still in a sling from a wound received in the previous campaign, was standing on the steps of the inner tower or donjon of the castle, in close conversation with McMorris.

As McMahon's party came in, the young count cast a look of strong dislike at the closed litter, and said hurriedly to McMorris:

"Of course it must be done, since the princess is so determined. She has all the obstinacy of her royal brother, without his strong sense. Who but a madwoman would have run so many heads into danger for a mere whim, an interview that can lead to nothing. But these Hohenzollerns are all set on their own way. It must be done, I suppose."

And he walked toward the litter, shrugging his shoulders like one who has a disagreeable task to perform, when McMahon urged his horse between the count and the litter, saying calmly:

"Not yet, count. I have orders to let no one see or speak to the prisoner till the commandant has read these dispatches."

The count frowned haughtily.

"Do you know who I am, sir?" he asked.

"Perfectly, Count Pollmeyer, captain in the Guards."

"And your superior officer. Retire, sir."

"Pardon me, no. You are not in command here, and if you wish to assume it, you must take the responsibility for everything, count, everything that may happen."

The count bit his lips and fell back to the side of McMorris, to whom he said, pettishly:

"Your friend is too punctilious. It may be well for him, some day, to have a friend at court."

"My friend, count, does his duty at all times," the young officer returned coldly. "You are aware that, much as I may wish to oblige you and those who are with you, I can only follow the line of my duty and obey orders."

He left Pollmeyer and advanced to meet McMahon, who saluted stiffly and handed him the sealed orders, with the remark:

"Dispatch from Baron Ziethen, lieutenant, with regard to the prisoner whom I've the honor to report to ye."

McMorris' face cleared up, for he had been looking worried and anxious before.

"Has he sent orders? Thank God!" he muttered.

"The responsibility's off me at last."

He eagerly tore open the orders and read them, with a face that constantly grew more and more satisfied in expression.

When he had finished, he placed them in the breast of his uniform, gave McMahon a glance that the latter understood as a signal that he should know all in good time, then advanced to the litter, opened the curtains, and said, quietly:

"Descend, monsieur. I am McMorris, and am here to conduct you to your apartment."

Trenck pointed to his manacled feet.

"Am I to enter my room in that guise?"

His tone was rather mournful than haughty, and his look pleading.

McMorris hesitated.

"Will you give your parole not to misuse the liberty to my detriment?" he said in a low tone. "I find you are acquainted with the substance of these orders, and you must know that any act of imprudence on your part will subject more than one person who wishes to befriend you to disgrace and death."

Trenck seemed struck by his manner, for he remained silent for quite a while.

At last he said with an effort:

"You are right. I will not ask to have the irons removed. I will go as I am. After all, it is only another item in the debt I owe him."

He closed his teeth as he uttered the last word, and his eyes spoke volumes of hate and revenge.

McMorris offered him his arm, and the strange spectacle was seen of an officer and a prisoner, ironed hand and foot, entering the old Castle of Konigstein together as equals.

McMahon saw them go up the steps and into the hall, when McMorris turned at the door and called back:

"Lieutenant McMahon, send me O'Donovan and O'Donohue. You understand?"

McMahon nodded, and dismissed his men; then sent for O'Donovan and O'Donohue, to whom he said quietly:

"Follow Mr. McMorris into the castle, and stay within call. There is a dangerous man with him, and he may need help."

O'Donohue grinned.

"A dangerous man, listenant! Sure we'll take all the danger out of him in short order av be thries any thicks. He's a purty boy, any way."

They had noticed the figure of the prisoner as he went into the castle, and saw that he towered nearly a head above McMorris, who was a tall young man.

Moreover, the prisoner's frame was cast in the mold of a Hercules, and his fierce, handsome face had an evil look on it as he tramped along in his clanking irons.

Then McMahon went round the castle on his own responsibility, and posted nearly a dozen sentries, to whom he gave orders to fire on the man in irons should he come out alone.

That done, he came back to the court, and found Count Pollmeyer walking up and down alone, with a thoughtful frown on his brow.

The count bowed slightly, and observed:

"You were right and I wrong, just now. Do you know who is that prisoner?"

"I do, count; and I fear—"

"What, sir?"

"That there will be trouble about him."

The count heaved a sigh of relief.

"I'm glad to hear you say it, for to tell the truth I feel terribly anxious. Do you know under what circumstances he comes here?"

"Not fully, but I can guess General Ziethen has been worked on to send him here on parole."

"No, no," said the count eagerly, "if that were so, I should feel easier; for even Trenck would not break his parole. That is not the worst of it. He has refused to give it, yet the princess has insisted on the interview; and Ziethen, like a fool, I say, has granted it."

McMahon looked at him gravely.

"Are you sure of that?"

"Yes, though I have not seen the orders. I tell you, Monsieur Mackern, there was a time when I disliked you gentlemen, but by heavens I shall admire you forever, if you get out of this scrape without disgrace."

McMahon seemed to be thinking intently.

"You say Trenck has refused to give his parole, not to escape; yet the general has sent him here to court an escape. I do not understand it. By what influences has he been worked upon?"

Count Pollmeyer sighed.

"I cannot tell. I know what has worked on me, and I can fancy what is the spell used to control him."

"And that is—?"

"Woman, monsieur, woman."

"On you! What woman?"

The count looked over his shoulder at the castle with a rueful sort of grin.

"They are both there. When a man's sister and his betrothed set on him together, he forgets all; and besides, I am not on duty. This arm of mine is like to keep me from the gall for a long time yet."

And McMahon could only think to himself:

"And so the other maid-of-honor is his betrothed. Holy fathers, I'm dished entirely, and I was promising myself a little consolation."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE RESULT OF THE INTERVIEW.

POLLMEYER and McMahon waited in the court a little while longer, when the Irishman f. It his curiosity growing uncontrolable.

The castle was quiet; McMorris had not come

out; and Pollmeyer did not seem disposed to go in.

"Count," said the hussar at last; "if ye don't want to stay all day in the court-yard, I'd like to go in and be introduced to the ladies."

Pollmeyer started and looked confused.

"I owe you a thousand apologies, monsieur; but I had forgotten my politeness in my anxiety. Come in if you please."

He led the way into the old castle, adding in a low voice:

"We shall find them all together; for it is a very strange thing, that, with all her romantic love for this man, the princess is inflexible in point of etiquette, and never sees him save in the presence of others. I understand they are in the great hall of the castle. Where is that?"

McMahon pointed out the way and led him thither up a winding flight of stone steps, built in the massive wall of this feudal fortress.

The great hall was in the second story of the donjon, only accessible by this single flight of stairs, and at its further end a second flight led upward to the battlements of the castle, from which there was no exit.

As they entered the hall, they saw McMorris seated on a broad stone bench, talking to a pair of ladies in traveling dress, to whom he appeared to be making himself agreeable, while the rest of the hall was empty save for the presence of Black Maurice O'Donovan, who was pacing to and fro at the other end, with his carbine lying over his arm, before the door of the stairway to the battlements.

McMahon looked blankly round him, and his friend McMorris noted and understood the glance, for he said in Irish:

"They are on the battlements, with Brown Maurice to watch them. Come here and make love to the dark one, for the honor of Erin."

The two ladies listened to the strange sounds and one of them said playfully:

"For shame, monsieur, to talk in such strange tongues. One would think you were Turks to hear those guttural accents."

McMahon looked at them both keenly and rapidly, and made a mental inventory:

"Both pretty; but give me the dark one. Holy St. Patrick, she has the rale Irish eye, laid in wid a dirty finger."

The eyes to which he referred were very dark blue, with long black lashes, like those which gave rise to the homely Irish simile, and the young lady had a soft gravity about her very different from the air of Countess Bertha Pollmeyer, who was her companion.

McMorris apologized for his rudeness in using a strange language, and added:

"My friend and companion in arms, Countess, the Lieutenant Moritz McMorris. Countess Hildegarde von Bremen and Countess Bertha von Pollmeyer, maids of honor to her Highness."

Pollmeyer added to his sister:

"Monsieur McMahon was the companion of Monsieur McMorris in the leap from the bridge which made us first acquainted. We are all good friends now in war time, and I entreat you, ladies to behave to monsieur as if he were my self."

Countess Bertha laughed a little maliciously.

"Then we shall tease him unmercifully, brother, and Hildegarde must scold him perpetually."

McMahon bowed low.

"I shall be charmed to be teased and scolded by such ladies as yourselves. This old castle is lighted up already by your presence, and if you will only scold and tease properly I will promise not to resent it."

Countess Hildegarde raised her soft eyes to his and instantly dropped them with a blush, as she murmured to her neighbor:

"Oh, Bertha, now can you be so rude! I would not think of scolding monsieur till I knew him better."

Pollmeyer uttered a rather sarcastic laugh.

"Monsieur will not value better acquaintance much, if it is only to bring him scolding. I would be content for my part to change places for a few days."

McMahon smiled as he said insinuatingly:

"I'm willing to make the exchange if you are. I'll take my chances of the scolding if you'll take mine of the responsibility of the post."

The count looked horrified.

"Take your responsibility? No, no, monsieur. You and your friend will have too much to share with an invalid."

Then he said to Bertha, meaningly:

"Have they been up there long?"

Bertha nodded.

"Nearly half an hour. But then, you know, they must have a good many things to talk about. Fancy that you had been separated from your Hildegarde for five years and locked up in a prison all the time. Would you not demand at least an hour to give and receive all the news?"

Pollmeyer shrugged his shoulders.

"Perhaps. At the same time, I think it only fair that I should go up, as the chamberlain to her highness, to warn her that it is near dinner time."

He cast a meaning glance at McMorris, who shook his head, as he answered:

"I would not take the responsibility, count. I'll answer for one thing—there is no danger even of such a man as Trenck taking advantage of our leaving him alone. You forget that there is a sentry on the battlements, and that nothing but a bird could get down thence to the court-yard."

Pollmeyer shrugged his shoulders.

"You don't know Trenck. He is a giant in power, and the most skillful fighter in Prussia. He can handle three ordinary men as easily as you could conquer a child."

"But he has not ordinary men to deal with," McMahon interposed, quietly. "I'll wager ye what ye like he doesn't get away with O'Donohue."

"Perhaps not. I know I wish he was safe back in Gratz. I feel like a man with a barrel of gunpowder by his side, and a lighted candle set in the midst of the powder. At any moment there may be an explosion."

"But suppose the poor fellow were to escape?" said Countess Hildegarde, softly, "would it not be a happy ending to his misery? I'm sure if I were his jailer, I should never be happy as long as he was behind bars. And he has been so faithful, they say. It is ten years since he met her highness, when they were almost boy and girl, and yet he and she have never faltered or hesitated to defy the king."

McMahon looked at the lady's face with much secret envy of Pollmeyer.

"Ah!" he sighed, "I could fancy a man might be faithful to some faces for ten years, and think it no hardship."

Pollmeyer uttered an impatient "pshaw!"

"A truce to romance. We have serious things to think of. Monsieur McMorris, is it permitted to inquire of you the tenor of your orders?"

McMorris looked round the hall, before he said, rather apprehensively:

"No one else must hear them; but we are all friends here. I will read them to you."

McMahon pricked up his ears and pressed closer, while the ladies made room for him on the stone bench, and by some process of which neither he nor Hildegarde seemed to be conscious, he found himself sitting next to Count Pollmeyer's betrothed, in such close proximity that he could feel the warmth of her body touching his own; while the count, who seemed to be a very indifferent lover, was pacing the hall with his back to the group, his arms folded, moodily inspecting the joinings of the flag pavement.

McMorris took out the papers from the breast of his uniform, and began to read:

"To Lieutenant McMorris or McMahon, at the Schools of Konigslin. (Confidential).

"LIEUTENANT:—As a special favor to the Princess Amelia, I have consented to grant her an interview with the prisoner we both know. I can only do it because I have four very extraordinary men to depend on in the execution of the project. I intrust the prisoner to you four alone. If he escapes, I am ruined. If he has his interview with the princess, and you can bring him back to Gratz, all will be well. I give him into your hands; and, if you do well, I shall not forget you. He is only to remain at your post till the princess departs. Then he must come back."

"ZIETHEN."

"Explicit enough," said McMahon, dryly: "but who can tell us how it comes Ziethen has made such a fool of himself for the princess?"

Pollmeyer stopped in his walk.

"I can tell that."

"Oh, brother, tell us, tell us," cried Bertha, eagerly. "I am sure there is something romantic in it."

Pollmeyer shrugged his shoulders.

"Romantic enough, no doubt, but hardly sensible. You know Ziethen was once in the ranks, and for a long time a subordinate officer. Well, it seems that the first person who brought him to the notice of the old king—not ours, but his father—was the Princess Amelia, then only a little child."

"How pretty, brother! But how did it happen?"

"I was a young man at the time in the Guards, and there was a great review at Potsdam. The hussars made a charge past the king, and, as they were at full gallop, a little child got in the way and was nearly being killed, when Ziethen, who was in advance of his squadron, threw himself half off his horse, picked up the child and saved its life. That was the turn of his luck."

"And why?" asked McMahon, curiously.

"The child, it appears, was foster-sister to the little Princess Amelia, and the mother told the queen, who interested herself for the old cornet—he was only a cornet at forty-six—and had him promoted. From that day Ziethen has had an absurd veneration for the little princess, whose influence, he insists, with her mother and father, was the cause of his rise in the world, and he has done things for her that in any other man would have brought down the king's anger."

"And why not on Ziethen?"

"Oh, well, he is a privileged character. The old king trusted him implicitly, and was wont to call him the best cavalry officer in his army, and the young king will stand more grumbling from him and Seidlitz than from all the rest of the generals put together."

"But Ziethen knows he has gone too far now, it appears, count?"

"Yes. I don't wonder he's afraid, but I, with less excuse, have been a worse fool."

Here Black Maurice, at the end of the hall, came to a "carry arms" and coughed.

"Are they coming?" asked McMorris, in Irish.

"Yes, my officer. The lady alone. I hear the man's chains clanking, and he is scolding O'Donohue."

McMorris rose with a rapid signal to McMahon, and they went to the foot of the stairs. A lady was coming down, and they heard the loud voice of a man in anger above.

"Insolent hussar! I'll go near the wall if I choose. Out of my way. Do you think I can fly down with these irons on?"

McMorris heard the click of a carbine-lock, and O'Donohue's voice replied in bad German:

"Back, or I fire."

At that moment the lady came down, and a glance at her face showed she had been weeping. Neither officer had ever seen the princess before, but they recognized her and bowed low, to which she replied by a slight nod of the head, saying, rapidly:

"Ah, mon Dieu, he is changed for the worse. Go up quickly. He is desperate, and may try to kill himself."

The two hussars ran up the winding stairs, followed by O'Donovan, and when they came on the battlements, found the giant prisoner glaring at O'Donohue, who kept him covered with his cocked carbine.

Trenck heard them, and glared round.

His handsome face was pale and haggard, and he burst out in French:

"For God's sake, shoot me, one of you! I have lost the love of an angel, and am not fit to live. Kill me if you are merciful."

He looked desperate enough, but there was an evident undercurrent of pain in his words that made them pity him, so McMorris said soothingly to him:

"Monsieur, be calm, if you have any love for her highness. Consider what she has risked to come here—"

Trenck burst into a bitter laugh.

"Risked? Ay, you all think of that! She is a princess of the blood, that is better than that of other mortals; though, less than a hundred years ago, the Hohenzollerns were plain nobles like the Trencks. Risked? Yes. She is bold enough to lure a man to love her to his death, but not bold enough to fly with him to happiness and obscurity when both are in her power. Risked? Ay, ay, 'twas a great risk, truly. She would rather be a princess with a gilded sorrow than the wife of Trenck. Risked indeed!"

McMahon interposed sternly:

"Monsieur, while we make allowances for your infirmities of temper, permit me to say that you must speak respectfully of a Princess of Prussia."

Trenck turned and glared at him. The wild beast in the man was rising again.

"You talk too loud, hussar. I am Trenck, and if you are not careful, I shall give you a lesson in politeness to ME."

He seemed to swell as he said "ME." It was clear that, in all his wretchedness, the vanity and fierce temper of the man were egregious.

"Do you think that because I am ironed hand and foot I fear you?" he continued fiercely. "You fools! I came here to meet my princess, mine, understand, who worships ME; and had I not determined to meet her, I should have escaped long ago. I have given no parole, and my irons are a delusion. Look!"

As he spoke, with a sudden exertion, he snapped the chains that bound him, in a way that showed they must have been tampered with on the road, seized O'Donovan, who was next to him, as if the stalwart Irishman had been a child, and threw him against O'Donohue as the latter was about to fire, both men falling in the sudden onslaught.

In another moment, with a roar of triumph, he bore down on McMahon, who had drawn his saber and leaped back.

He gathered up his irons as he came, and struck with the dangling chains at the Irishman's head so ferociously, that even McMahon had to retreat.

Then McMorris, with an active leap, caught him behind with the old pull trick, and all the giant's strength was unequal to protect him from being flung on his back on the stone roofs.

At that very moment the sound of shots outside the castle startled every one.

CHAPTER XV.

THE TWO TRENCKS.

TRENCK lay on his back, more than half dazed by the unexpected fall, for he had counted on his enormous strength, and miscalculated the agility and skill of his foes.

The sound of the shots recalled him to his senses, and he bounded to his feet, shouting:

"A Trenck! A Trenck! To me, pandours!"

And in that moment the four Maurices, from the sound of the firing, perceived that a serious attack was being made on the castle, and saw at once the full scope of the plot of which they had been made the victims.

The unscrupulous adventurer had worked on

the feelings of the princess to secure an empty interview, which could end in nothing, for the princess had sworn to her brother never to wed Trenck without the king's consent; but the prisoner had taken advantage of her weakness to notify his uncle, the pandour chief, and it was the elder Trenck who was now so fiercely attacking the castle.

McMorris looked over the battlements, beheld his faithful bussars driven in by a large force of wild-looking horsemen, who advanced with loud shouts, and saw in that moment that the chances were ten to one that the prisoner would be rescued.

And if Trenck were rescued Ziethen must be ruined, and the whole business come to the king's ears.

In that moment the eyes of the two Macs met, and McMahon cried:

"I'll stand by ye, lad. If the four Maurices can't hate the two Trencks we'll never see old Ireland again."

They had no time to lose in talking. Already the pandours had driven the hussars to the walls of the castle, and Trenck was running along the battlements waving his arms and shouting encouragement, while O'Donovan and O'Donobue were struggling to their feet, bewildered.

"Stop him first," said McMorris, pointing to the prisoner, and with that he and McMahon ran to Trenck and pulled him back from the battlements by surprise.

In a moment the giant turned and dealt McMorris a fierce blow with his chains, that broke in the hussar's shako and brought the young man to his knees.

Even as he dropped, he seized Trenck by the leg and pulled him down, when O'Donovan struck the giant on the back of the head with the butt of his carbine, and stunned him for a while.

"Secure him while I go below," panted the young lieutenant, struggling to his feet. "The men won't fight if we don't lead them. Give him a tap every time he moves, O'Donovan."

O'Donovan smiled grimly, with the blood running down his face, where Trenck had flung him against O'Donohue.

"I'll quiet the devil, lieutenant," he said. "This carbine makes an illigant shillalab."

"Can you handle him alone?" queried McMahon anxiously, as McMorris hurried off.

"He don't fool me again," was all O'Donovan answered, as he poised his carbine. "Go on, lieutenant. Give them ballyhoo. Brown Maurice, I'll not want ye."

McMahon waited for no more. Trenck was evidently insensible, and the noise below was increasing momentarily. The two Irish hussars ran down the steps into the hall; passed by the cowering group of ladies without noticing them; thence into the court below, which was full of men in fierce conflict.

McMorris was waving his sword and shouting to his men, who were for the most part on foot with their carbines, while the pandours were all mounted. The few hussar vedettes that had been out on horseback had come in with the rest, and the pandours had followed them pell-mell into the court, the gate having been left open. But the hussars, who knew the ins and outs of the fortress, had such an advantage over their foes, spite of the superiority of the wild pandours in numbers, that already they had killed many men and horses, and McMahon law that a vigorous charge would probably scatter the enemy.

To see this, with him, was to execute the charge, and he raised a wild Irish yell, echoed by the hussars with a shout and a volley, when the pandours fled as fast as they had come, and in a moment the court was cleared.

"Shut the gates," roared McMahon; and he and O'Donohue rushed to close them, when they saw a gigantic officer, in garments glittering with gold-lace, come galloping on the open space in front of the castle, roaring:

"Pandours, to me! We have the castle! Charge for Trenck!"

The wild undisciplined horsemen wavered and turned; but before they could make up their minds to charge, O'Donobue fired his carbine and shot the big officer's horse, while the hussars raised a shout of triumph as they saw the animal fall, and finally succeeded in shutting the gate, and throwing the heavy iron bars across it, inside.

Then the excitement calmed down, for the hussars knew well that the fortress in which they were posted was impregnable save to artillery, and their horses were all safe in the stables round the inner court.

The castle was one of those built in the middle ages, with high massive walls and a broad dry moat round it on all sides, the moat having perpendicular sides, at least twenty feet deep, so that it was impracticable, except to scaling-ladders.

The walls outside were intact, though the buildings were dilapidated, owing to a defective foundation at one point, which had caused cracks in the donjon and made a breach in one of the towers.

Otherwise Konigstein—literally the "King's Rock"—was one of those rare things in Europe, a "maiden fortress"—one which had never been taken.

"Faith, McMorris, we're well out of that," said McMahon dryly, as he wiped his saber and looked at the pandours dashing to and fro outside. "A little more, and we'd have lost prisoner and life together. What's to be done now?"

"Put the castle in order," said McMorris, promptly. "We can hold it against all the pandours in Bohemia, if they don't bring siege artillery against us."

They hurried round among the men, putting the place in order, and found that their loss in the sudden attack had been four killed, a dozen wounded, and two men missing, who had been on the extreme out-post in the forest, probably killed or captured.

This reduced their force to about fifty men in the castle, where, moreover, they had only three days' rations for the men, with seventy horses to feed and nothing to feed them with, for they had been depending on a forage train which had not come up, but was expected that very day.

And to add to their embarrassment; here was the Princess of Prussia, with her two maids of honor; Count Pollmeyer, a helpless invalid, and Trenck, a dangerous prisoner, all to protect, with the certainty that, if they applied for help to the next post, the facts of the madcap expedition of the princess must come to the king's ears, with the probable disgrace of General Ziethen, for his weakness, as the result.

McMorris and McMahon, as soon as they had posted the guards and secured the fortress against the danger of immediate attack, went back to the donjon hall, where they found the princess and her ladies gathered together in a group, the princess pale and trembling, her companions equally full of fear at the sounds outside, which they had heard, Count Pollmeyer trying to comfort them.

As the two Irish officers came in, the count said:

"I told your highness there was no danger. This castle was never taken yet. It is a maiden fortress. Here come our friends to tell us so. Is it not true, gentlemen, that we are in no danger?"

"None whatever," said McMorris encouragingly.

"Your highness has no occasion to be alarmed in any manner. We can hold this place against all the pandours of a dozen villains like Trenck."

The princess looked up quickly.

"Trenck! Did you say Trenck? Is it Baron Franz Trenck is outside here?"

"I believe so, highness," said McMorris gravely.

She clasped her hands with a look of terror and agony.

"Oh, is it possible that he has deceived me?" she murmured in a low tone.

McMorris heard her, but said nothing, for it was a sort of tacit etiquette among them that none should mention before the princess the name of her disgraced lover.

McMahon made a sign to Count Pollmeyer and turned his back, walking to the other end of the hall, followed by the invalid guardsman.

"What is it?" whispered Pollmeyer.

"Get the ladies away," muttered McMahon. "Don't ye see the princess wants to talk to McMorris? Ye don't want to be listening."

Pollmeyer looked confused; for the Irishman's tact put him to shame, with all his court ways.

He beckoned to his sister, who came to him with the Countess Bertha; and all three walked with McMahon to the end of the hall, where they pretended to look out of the window, leaving the princess alone with McMorris.

The lady seemed to be unusually embarrassed for a person of her high rank before a simple lieutenant of hussars; for she made several attempts to speak, without success, and at last murmured, almost inaudibly:

"Monsieur, you are the commandant!"

"I am, your highness."

"And you know the cause of my coming here?"

"I do, your highness."

"I came to see a poor unhappy man, who craved my favor with his majesty."

"Baron Ziethen mentioned the fact in his orders, your highness."

"Ah, Ziethen is good; he is noble. But he has put himself in peril for me."

"Very grave peril, your highness."

"And all for nothing. Ah, mon Dieu, you do not know how I suffer, monsieur."

McMorris looked at her rich traveling dress and beautiful face, and thought to himself:

"The suffering has not aged you yet."

Aloud he said:

"Your highness has the sincere sympathy of your servants, or they would not be here."

Amelia hesitated before putting the next question.

"Monsieur, there has been a—a battle. It is most inexpressibly painful to me to have been the cause of such bloodshed. Are any of your men hurt?"

"Four are killed, madame, twelve wounded, and two are in the hands of Trenck, the pandour."

Amelia shuddered.

"It is terrible, but—"

She looked up searchingly.

"Is he hurt?"

McMorris knew whom she meant. He had never seen a princess in love before, but it needed no divination to tell whom she inquired about.

"If your highness means Baron Trenck, the cause of all this trouble," he said coldly, "the gentleman is still alive, I believe, and remains where you left him, under guard."

"And it is his uncle who besieges the castle?"

"It is, madame."

She clasped her hands fervently.

"Oh, what might not that man deserve of me who should permit him to escape!"

McMorris drew himself up.

"I hope that I mistake your highness," he said, "if you remember that Baron Trenck is now supposed by his majesty to be a prisoner in Gratz, and that Baron Ziethen is responsible for his safety. To permit Monsieur Trenck to escape from this castle now would be to render it impossible to hide anything that has passed from the king."

Amelia started violently.

"Mon Dieu! what is that you say? The king! He must not know anything. Mon Dieu! he would be capable of ordering his death or mine."

"Then, madame, it is absolutely necessary that the baron be returned to the fortress of Gratz before the king bears of it; and this pandour, Trenck, must be driven off."

Amelia seemed to be much struck by his words, for she said, immediately:

"Monsieur, I have been wild, imprudent, rash. I have compromised others, and if this matter comes to his majesty's ears I, too, shall be compromised. The story will be all over Europe."

And she wrung her hands, and seemed overwhelmed with terror at the idea.

"Would I had never come here!" she murmured. "Perfidious Trenck! he implored to see me only to give me some secret information affecting my brother, which he swore would be sufficient to buy his freedom; and instead of that, he has deceived me, and hopes to compromise me publicly."

McMorris stood patiently by her, as if waiting orders; and at last she said:

"Monsieur, I must confide in you. You seem to be a cool, brave young man, and I want help."

"Your highness may rely on me for help, so far as my life and sword will avail."

"It may avail much; but it is your brain to invent that is needed now."

McMorris smiled.

"In that event, I shall have to consult my comrade, madame. Our two heads are better than any one in Prussia."

"As you please—but I must not hear you. I can ill bear telling this even to you, but I should die if more than one heard me tell it."

"I will obey your highness."

"Listen then—"

But she hardly seemed able to go on, and the hussar aided her by saying:

"If I dared question your highness, it might aid us both somewhat!"

"Do, do. Ask what you want to know."

"I will. First, am I to understand that you think that the prisoner, Trenck, has communicated with the pandour, Trenck, from Gratz?"

"He must have done so. Alas, I know too well how he sent the intelligence."

"Has your highness been in the habit of sending and receiving such communications to and from the prisoner?"

Amelia colored deeply.

"I have. In my—my love for that man, I have bribed his jailers for years."

"Can your highness give me the name of the agent at Gratz?"

Amelia considered a little.

"I do not know, unless it be the Jew, Meyer Anselm, who has carried our letters."

"Where does he live?"

"In the town of Prague. He is a peddler, who travels to and fro. He it was who gave my letter to Ziethen, imploring him to grant me the interview here."

"And why did not your highness rather go to Gratz, and avoid this danger?"

"Because—because—"

She colored deeply and threw up her head.

"Because I am a princess, monsieur; and to go to Gratz, where all knew Trenck, would be to expose myself to comment. So it was settled that none should know who I was, or that the prisoner I came to see was Trenck."

McMorris coughed slightly.

"Your highness is then very careful of your own reputation."

She laughed bitterly.

"His majesty has left me little else to be careful of. Yes, I am careful of it. I might have been happy long ago had I given it up. I might be happy to-day, were I to say to Trenck, 'I will fly with you to Austria.' I have only now to go to yonder gates, order them opened, and say to the pandour, Trenck: 'There, I am a princess of Prussia, with your nephew, the king's victim. Carry us off to Vienna.' He would do it, and the world would applaud me, and laugh at the King of Prussia."

"And why does not your highness do this?"
 "Because I have sworn to my brother I would not," she replied, proudly. "You do not know us of the Hohenzollerns, monsieur. We love fiercely, and we quarrel fiercely. My father would have killed the present king many a time when he was a boy, had it not been for my mother; yet the present king forgets all his own past misery, and inflicts it on every brother and sister he has, in his turn. And, for all that, we join with him against the rest of the world, and not one of us has disgraced the family. No. The woman, Amelia, loves Trenck, and would yield all to him; but the princess, Amelia, knows in him the enemy of her country, and will not fly with him, to weaken the king before his foes, and strengthen the hands of Austria."

McMorris bowed.

"I expected no less from your highness. But it is necessary to know how far Trenck's plot has proceeded. Will your highness graciously state the particulars of your conversation on the battlements, and wherefore I found him so desperate and angry?"

"I will, monsieur. It is necessary for you to know. First, I must tell you that this interview was granted by me very reluctantly, and after much entreaty; on the solemn promise of Trenck that he would only use it to tell me certain truths, important to the king. In an evil hour I consented, and arranged with Baron Ziethen this meeting. When I saw that unhappy man first, I intended to do so only in the presence of my ladies; but he insisted that his news was too important to be trusted to any but my own ear. I consented to see him in the presence of a sentry, who did not understand French, and we went to the battlements, as you know. What was my surprise, when he confessed to me that his plan was all a subterfuge to see me, and tell me how he loved me, and that if I would only, now, at the eleventh hour, say the word, he had the plan of escape prepared. It was then that I was so alarmed at my own weakness and his perfidy, that I burst into tears and told him indignantly that I hated him, as I fled from him. The rest you know, monsieur."

McMorris looked thoughtfully at the ground. "And he said nothing of how he proposed to escape?"

"No, monsieur. I was too much alarmed at the discovery that he had deceived me and had not a word to tell me. Ah, monsieur, you do not know how I counted on the interview! I hoped to be able to go to his majesty and say: 'Here is the man you imprisoned for loving me who has now saved your kingdom.' He could not have helped pardoning him, and we might have been happy. But now—"

She buried her face in her hands and sobbed.

"Your highness has cause to be angry with this pertiduous Trenck," said Maurice gravely. "He has trifled with the noblest woman in Europe."

She looked up wearily.

"It is my fate to love him. And in all his wickedness, see how he loves me. The princess may condemn him, but you do not know women if you think I can be angry with him for trying to force me to my own happiness, even if it be guilty in the eyes of the world."

It was evident that the Princess Amelia, in her long brooding over her love affairs, had become morbid, and hardly knew whether to let the woman or the princess assume sway over her actions.

McMorris roused her from her reflections by saying:

"That is all past and gone. Your highness is not a common woman, but a Princess of Prussia; and it is necessary to act quickly to save your highness's reputation. Your highness will be missed from Berlin."

The princess shook her head.

"Not till the day after to-morrow. I am supposed to have gone on a tour round my estates in this vicinity. Indeed I have a chateau, not twenty miles from here, where I stopped last night. Once there, I should have no further fears."

"Then your highness must get there," said McMorris quietly. "Give me leave to consult with my three countrymen, and I will engage to bring your highness there to-night."

"Can you, indeed, monsieur? But we are surrounded by the enemy."

"We will find a way out, madame. Rest easy. We do not admit that the Princess Amelia is in the Castle of Konigstein, till the Pandour Trenck knows it certainly. Till that time, there are no ladies here, as far as the enemy are aware. Trust our Irish brains to find a way out of this trouble."

He left her sitting on the stone bench, while he beckoned McMorris and O'Donohue to follow him to the battlements. When they came there they found Trenck still lying senseless at the feet of O'Donovan.

CHAPTER XVI.

IRISH BRAINS.

The four Irishmen grouped round the fallen giant, and McMorris looked at him curiously.

"How long has he been so?" he asked O'Dono-

van, for Trenck's face was waxy white, and his breathing barely perceptible.

O'Donovan looked at the senseless man critically.

"Av you're particular to the minutes, listin-ant, I couldn't tell ye; but it's my belief he's been that way since I giv him the last crack."

"What last crack? The one we saw you give?"

O'Donovan grinned.

"Divil resave the hard-headed baste, did ye think that would settle the likes of him? Sure his head's as hard as a ten year old bull's between the horns. He got up three times, and I had to take him a fresh rap every time before he got his sinses fairly, or, by the cross, he'd have settled me, so he would."

"And you've knocked him down three times, with the butt of that carbine."

"Four times, listin-ant, four times, to be exact. I thought I'd never git the devil quiet; but he's as peaceable as a lamb now."

McMahon turned over the body, and found a lump as big as a hen's egg on the back of Trenck's skull, which sufficiently accounted for his stupor.

"Faith, O'Donovan," he said dryly, "you were set on his not escaping."

"And didn't your honors tell me to keep him, and how could I keep such a big spaldeen as that without tying him fast? Divil a rope had I. So I just had to knock him down every time he got up, and a good job I made of it."

"Well," observed McMorris, "we'll have to secure him some other way now, boys. O'Donohue, go and get cords, and fasten him, so he cannot move."

O'Donohue saluted and went off for the cords, when McMorris continued to his friend:

"Red Maurice, we're in a scrape."

"I know it, White Maurice."

"We must put our heads together to save two other people, neither of whom will thank us."

"And who are they?"

"The princess Amelia and General Ziethen."

"And what's the reason Ziethen won't thank us?"

"Because he'll know we hold his secret."

"And why won't she thank us?"

"Because, to save her, we shall have to send her lover back to prison; and the woman will hate us for it, though the princess accepts the service."

"White Maurice, I don't agree with ye."

"Why not?"

"I think that both the general and the princess will be grateful even if they don't thank us. Who wants to be thanked? We'll have to keep the secrets of two people who can help us greatly in our career; and, if we succeed, they will see that we are promoted. Tell me what have we to do?"

"We've got to return Trenck to the fortress of Gratz, without any one ever knowing that he has ever left it."

"Is that all?"

"No."

"What's next?"

"We have to smuggle the princess and her ladies out of this castle, and get them to the chateau of Shaffhausen by to-morrow, without letting the enemy know they are in this castle at all."

"Why not?"

"Because, if Trenck the uncle, who is a confirmed reprobate and boaster, hears that the Princess of Prussia is in this castle, he will spread the news over Europe, and our king's sister will be talked of in a manner that—"

"That needn't be mentioned further. I perceive."

"Yes. And now comes the question how to keep it from Trenck. I am convinced that he is not yet certain who is in this castle, but has made his attack on a venture."

"Why d'ye think it?"

"Because, if he knew it, he would have demanded a parley long ago. Ye notice that, since the first repulse, his men have been quiet. I imagine he thinks he's attacked too soon."

Even as he spoke a bugle sounded on the glacis in front of the castle, and McMahon said, in the dryest of tones:

"White Morris, there goes your first theory to the winds. The pandour's demanding a parley."

Here O'Donohue came up with a quantity of cordage, and the bugle sounded again.

"Tie him fast," said McMorris, motioning to the insensible Trenck, "while I answer the bugle."

He went to the edge of the battlements and looked down on the open ground before the castle. A white flag was held there by a horseman, accompanied by a trumpeter, who sounded his instrument for the third time as he looked. McMorris waved his hand to the horseman, and made signs that he would descend, after which he left the battlements.

Then he came back and found that his three followers had bound the insensible Trenck in such a manner that he might safely be trusted alone, while the returning color of his face showed that he was recovering his senses."

"Leave him here and come down with me," said McMorris, briefly. "I'll want all the wits

we have to-day, and if four Irishmen in a strange land can't make up a plot to beat their enemies, we'll turn Dutchmen."

They all went down stairs to the court and ascended the ramparts over the gate, where they looked down at the open ground below and saw that the two pandours had dismounted and were waiting patiently for an audience.

"What would you?" cried McMorris in French.

He saw that the pandour with a flag wore gold lace on his uniform, and judged him to be an officer who understood French, the common tongue of officers at that day.

The pandour bowed politely, answering:

"I am the Baron Von Brunn, envoy from his excellency, General Trenck, and wish to see the commandant of the fortress."

"I am the commandant, Lieutenant McMorris."

Von Brunn bowed again.

"The general wishes a private parley."

"What do you mean by a *private parley*?"

"Between himself and yourself alone."

"Tell him to come to the outposts, and I will meet him. He can enter the castle if he will consent to be blindfolded."

"The general prefers a parley here."

"Tell him, then, to withdraw his men and come alone, where you are. I will meet him."

"Pardon, monsieur, but that will be within gun-shot of your men. We wish the interview to take place in our camp."

McMahon laughed.

"And who is to secure me against being taken prisoner by surprise?"

"The honor of Trenck," returned the pandour, proudly curling his mustache.

"Don't do it, McMorris," muttered McMahon.

"His word's not worth a rush. Make him come here if he is in earnest."

McMorris nodded.

"Hola, monsieur," he called to the pandour.

"I await monsieur's answer," was the reply.

"Please tell the general that his request, or demand, is inadmissible."

"Why, monsieur?"

"Because a demand on a fortress must be made before the fortress. We don't ask a parley—if you want one, come to us."

The pandour seemed disappointed.

"Am I to take that answer as final?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"You will allow me to communicate with my chief, I presume?"

"Certainly, monsieur."

"And you will await the answer?"

"Certainly, monsieur. The castle will not move from its foundations while you are gone. Sound again, when you are ready."

He stepped down behind the parapet, as the other slowly mounted his horse and rode away.

Then a discussion took place among the four Irishmen in their own tongue, in which the two peasants, O'Donovan and O'Donohue, took part with as much freedom as their chiefs, while the two Macs did not hesitate to ask their advice.

"Black Maurice," said McMorris, "can you think of any plan to get three women out of this castle, without letting the enemy know they're here?"

O'Donovan looked wise.

"I can tell, if you give me time to think, son of the McMurroughs."

"Can you tell me, O'Donohue?"

"Yes, my officer."

"Good! Your head works well, Brown Maurice."

"No better than mine," grumbled O'Donohue.

"It does. He has a plan. You have none, yet." O'Donovan saluted.

"I have one now, my officer."

"Let us hear Brown Maurice first. Tell us the plan you have, O'Donohue."

O'Donohue pointed to the traveling carriage in the court-yard.

"Put them in there, and drive off."

"Brown Maurice, you're a fool! How would we get them past the enemy?"

"Let me drive, my chief, and I'll take them off, so the pandours can't catch us."

"How, Brown Maurice?"

McMahon looked surprised, observing, in French, to his friend:

"He is no fool. He has a plan."

Brown Maurice saluted.

"The road to Berlin comes in behind the castle, my chief, a quarter of a mile away, and there is a back postern gate, of which no one knows, that leads to a path through the woods."

"But no carriage can go out of a postern gate, or through a bridle path."

"No, my chief."

"Then how are you going to manage?"

"Open the gates and drive out the front way, so as to draw the enemy there. Let the ladies in the meantime be ready at the postern gate, and go on foot to the road. I will meet them there with the carriage, and they can get in."

McMahon scratched his head.

"O'Donohue, I don't understand your plan at all. What think you of it, Black Maurice?"

Black Maurice saluted, and replied, much to the surprise of both officers:

"O'Donohue's right, sir. If he'll drive the carriage, I'll take the ladies to the road."

"But how are you going to take the carriage to the place of meeting unharmed?"

"That's for your honors to find out. Keep the pandours off the road till we get down to the steep descent to the west, and I'll engage that either Brown Maurice or myself will take the carriage safely through."

McMahon clapped his friend on the shoulder.

"You don't see it yet, do you? I do. The plan will work, and I know how to work it!"

McMorris looked bewildered.

"I don't yet."

"Listen. We must get Trenck into the castle."

"Yes, I see that; but what then?"

"Then we must induce him to order his men to retire to a certain spot."

"How can we do that?"

"By promising him his prisoner."

"I begin to see."

"And when once they are at a distance, we must make a dash for it, as Brown Maurice says."

"But they can catch a carriage surely."

"On a level road, yes, but not in the place where Brown Maurice means to go."

"And where's that?"

"The Devil's Gully Road."

McMorris started. The Devil's Gully Road was a short cut, hardly practicable for horsemen, by which one might avoid a circuit of six or seven miles on the road to Berlin. As Brown Maurice had stated, there was a path through the woods in the rear of the castle, from a small postern gate, which joined this road about five miles off; but the idea of taking a carriage down the Devil's Gully Road, where horsemen had to dismount to lead their animals down, was such a daring one that he involuntarily said aloud:

"It is impossible. It can't be done. You'll only kill the horses and smash everything."

O'Donohue saluted.

"If your honors will only keep the pandours back till I get to the Devil's Gully, I'll go bail to get down safely, and your honors can get inside if ye like."

McMahon uttered a cry of satisfaction.

"Say no more. I've the idea. We'll put Trenck himself in the carriage."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE PLAN PROGRESSES.

McMORRIS stared at his friend amazedly. Usually he was the keenest in point of intellect of the three, for he had received a good education and had read much; but in matters of action he was as yet inferior to McMahon, whose military life had begun ten years before.

"Listen," said McMahon; "it's plain the pandour suspects all that we have in here, or he'd not have made his attack immediately on his nephew's arrival. It's my opinion he must have known he was coming—"

"He did, he did," interrupted McMorris with an accent of conviction, as he remembered the words of the princess. "He has had a Jew spying in his service to find it out."

"Then we can't hide from him the fact that Trenck the younger is here."

"We can deny it, till we find if he's certain."

"True for you, Maurice. After all, the great thing is, to conceal the ladies. As for that devil of a Trenck, he's not born to drown or be shot, I'll go bail for him."

"If we can get them out of the castle to the back road, there still remains the difficulty: how shall we make Trenck think they have not been here?"

"That's for you to say, McMorris. You're the best of us four at a palaver. You must fool the pandour chief, the best ye know how."

McMorris closed his lips with an air of reserve.

"I'll do it. I'll think of a plan. What do you want me to do to help you?"

"Simply this. Hold out as long as you like; but finally agree to give up your prisoner, if the pandours will retire so that he can come out in a carriage. Tell Trenck that he came in that carriage from Gratz."

"Very well. What then?"

"When he has sent his men away, I will bring the prisoner down and put him in the carriage."

"Yes, and what then?"

"I'll get in with him, and Brown Maurice shall drive. When we get near the Devil's Gully, I'll fire a pistol as a signal."

"For what?"

"For you to tell the pandour to get out and take his nephew."

"I see. And you?"

"We'll draw them all after us, and go down the Devil's Gully Road. The carriage will hold up the horses, and Trenck will not dare to follow."

"But suppose he does?"

"I have it. That's for your part."

"In what manner?"

"If the pandours follow they'll have to dismount, and come in file or by twos, while the carriage will be at the bottom in no time—"

"If you're not all smashed up."

"We won't be. If we are we're rid of Trenck

any way; for he'll be inside. But what I mean is this, none of them will dare to ride down the Devil's Gully. They'll have to dismount and scramble down on foot, which will take time."

"Yes, I see that."

"In the mean time you'll take the ladies out by the postern way, through the path in the forest, and get the horse litter out, with about twenty good men for escort."

"I see. Go on."

"And then it's all plain sailing."

"I see what you mean. We are to meet you, carriage and all, put the ladies in the carriage, transfer Trenck to the litter, send off the ladies, and bring back Trenck here."

McMahon smiled slightly.

"Very good all but the last."

"I don't understand you."

"Why, what's the use of bringing Trenck back to this place, when we can pass him on back to Gratz at once, so nobody will be the wiser?"

McMorris held out his hand frankly.

"McMahon, your head's better than mine. It is you that ought to be the commandant."

McMahon could not help showing his gratification in his looks, as he grasped the offered hand.

"My dear boy, we're all brothers in this foreign land. Devil a one of us but is fit to be commandant; and we'll all stick together. There comes that baste of a pandour now. Hark to the horn!"

In fact, the trumpet sounded again outside, and they perceived the pandour officer waving his flag for a new parley.

"Where is your chief?" cried McMorris.

"The General Baron Trenck desires me to say that, if he enters your castle, he desires a hostage to be sent to our camp."

"The general can go to the devil. If he don't come alone, he can stay where he is."

"He desires further to say that he has two of your hussars prisoners, and proposes to exchange them for his nephew, who is a prisoner in your castle."

McMorris laughed.

"Tell him his proposition is nonsensical. In the first place, his nephew is in Gratz; not here at all. In the second place, if he were here I could not exchange him, not a prisoner of war, for two soldiers, who are prisoners of war."

The pandour bowed politely.

"The general desired me further to say that, should his proposition be rejected, he should feel obliged to shoot both prisoners."

"Tell the general that if he does so, I shall take care to publish the fact, and that we shall shoot five wounded prisoners of yours, now in our hands, at once."

The pandour appeared to hesitate, and McMahon muttered:

"It's only a threat. He won't do it. Look yonder. There's Trenck himself watching."

In fact they would see the gigantic figure of the great partisan leader who strikingly resembled his more polished nephew—in form and character.

The elder Trenck sat on a big bony charger at the edge of the woods, watching, and as his messenger went back, they saw him gesticulating violently as if in a passion, till finally he galloped out in front of the gate, and roared out:

"Insolent subalterns; if you do not surrender my nephew to me, I will burn your castle over your heads, and roast you all alive."

"Send a bullet by his head, Black Maurice," said McMorris quietly. "He needs a lesson."

Black Maurice was an excellent shot, and when he sent a shot through Trenck's shako, the shock seemed to surprise the partisan, who wheeled and fled out of range, roaring:

"Assassins! I defy you."

"Bedad, ye'd better not do too much defying," said McMahon dryly. "Ye'll come under the flag next time, I'll go bail."

And indeed the shot seemed to have knocked a little sense into Trenck; for, when next he hove in sight, it was under the flag of truce, with his officer beside him, and it was the officer who spoke with great politeness:

"General Trenck represents respectfully that it is against the customs of war to fire on one who is parleying."

"Then let him come with a flag every time, and refrain from insult," returned Maurice firmly.

"We know our rights and are ready to maintain them. What does the general wish?"

"A private interview," returned the officer.

"Is he willing to be blindfolded and to come into our castle unarmed?"

"Yes," returned Trenck himself sullenly. "I may as well get it over one time as another. I will do as you request. I have important news to tell you."

"Then be good enough to dismount; order your men to retire out of gun-shot of our gates, and advance to the draw-bridge to be blindfolded," said McMorris.

Trenck hesitated.

"To be blindfolded is a humiliation to which I do not care to submit."

"And to admit you with yours eyes open is a folly we do not care to commit, monsieur."

And McMorris smiled and bowed mockingly.

Trenck frowned and appeared to be considering. At last he said sullenly:

"I'll remain here and you can come out and meet me. Will that do?"

"Perfectly, monsieur, on conditions."

"What are they?"

"That you order your men to file out and pass in review by this gate till they are out of gun-shot, that I may see whether your force will justify me in surrendering."

Trenck seemed to be pleased at the idea; for he said:

"Certainly, certainly. I admire your prudence. I have at least ten thousand men here, and the customs of war would justify you in an unconditional surrender. I know your force to be only a troop of hussars. I will give the order."

He turned to his officer gave him some orders and then added:

"If you will come down with me and inspect the men as they pass, I shall be honored by your company, commandant."

McMorris bowed and smiled.

"I am much honored by the invitation, but I prefer to remain here, unless you prefer to join me."

Trenck hesitated a moment and seemed to be struck by a sudden idea for he replied:

"Be it so. I will come up to you. I presume you will not insist on the blindfolding, when I am with yourself."

"Only till you are up here, and in going back, general. I must insist on my rights, to protect myself from responsibility."

Trenck seemed to be pleased.

"You are a wise man, sir. I will come up to once, and we will review my troops."

Then he sent off his officer to his troops, got off his horse and gave it to the standard-bearer to hold, after which he advanced fearlessly on foot to the drawbridge of the castle.

"Now, McMahon," said McMorris hurriedly, "comes the time for our plan. Trenck thinks we are losing heart and want to treat for the surrender of the castle. Possibly he will try bribery also. Go down and bring him up blindfolded to me. Then get the ladies off by the postern under Black Maurice's care, and take along the horse-litter and twenty men. When you are outside, send me word by a hussar that all is ready. Leave the rest to Brown Maurice and me."

McMahon saluted and departed to fetch Trenck when McMorris continued:

"Brown Maurice, go and put the prisoner in the carriage. Mr. McMahon will go with you and take care of him, as soon as the gates are opened to go out."

O'Donohue saluted and went off; and very soon after, McMahon and O'Donovan came up the tower steps leading the blindfolded commander of the pandours who was conducted to McMorris as they stood by the parapet.

Then McMorris said politely:

"Now, general, you can remove the bandage, and we can talk business in private."

The pandour chief raised the bandage, looked round him keenly, as if trying to take in all he could, and observed:

"I am ready to talk when we are alone."

McMorris turned to his friends.

"Lieutenant McMahon, you will execute the order I gave you, and report in person when all is ready. Put the party in charge of Black Maurice, who will go with you."

McMahon gave him a signal of intelligence and went off with O'Donovan, when McMorris continued:

"Now, Monsieur Trenck, we can speak freely. What do you require?"

Trenck immediately assumed a smiling air.

"I begin to understand you. You have put on a good face with the rest to cover up a surrender. I will tell you, monsieur, what I require and you will say it is not much. In the first place you are not a Prussian. You have no reason to be faithful to the tyrannical king, while there are hundreds of brave men of your country in the service of the Empress of Austria. You are not a fool. Come. Surrender the fort and I promise you a major's commission in my regiment and a thousand thalers for outfit."

McMorris shook his head.

"That is no temptation. I should not dare to go into action, for fear the Prussians might take me prisoner and shoot me as a deserter."

"I see. Well we will do more than that for you. I will recommend you to the empress for a position in her body-guard as a captain with a pension of a thousand thalers a year."

"That is better, general."

"I knew you'd say so. Come, your answer?"

"To what, general?"

"Will you surrender the castle?"

"Oh, no. Of course not."

Trenck frowned fiercely.

"What mean you? Do you dare to fight with me?"

"No, general. But you asked a question and I had to answer it. I will not surrender the castle under any circumstances."

"Trenck caught at the words."

"Ah, I see your meaning. You will

"I may, general, under certain conditions."

"Name them, monsieur, name them."

"I prefer first to find out what it is that you wish me to surrender."

"My nephew, monsieur. I know he is in this castle, for I saw him on the battlements and received intelligence that he was to be here to-day before I advanced."

"You appear to be well informed, general."

"I am, sir, as you have found out."

"But suppose I deny that your nephew is in this castle at all?"

"It would be useless, sir. I know that he is here, and you need not deny it."

"In that case, general, it would be useless for me to say anything on the subject."

"Exactly, monsieur. I don't wish to force you to admit it openly. Will you give him up?"

"On condition that I do it in my own way, I will do it, monsieur."

Trenck uttered a sigh of relief.

"Ah, you are in! I am a man of honor. Come, name your price."

"I ask now, general. I ask only that I may do what is to be done in my own way."

"Tell me what you require, and I will do it."

"Very well. In the first place, general, I don't care to leave the Prussian service, for I think we are going to you in this war."

"Hum! You don't care? But go on."

"If I give up your nephew openly I shall be court-martialed and shot. If, on the contrary, he is captured by you on the way to Berlin, I may be exchanged."

"I see. I see. Go on," said the baron, rubbing his hands. "What am I to do? I'll do it."

McMorris looked over to the woods from which the head of the pandour column was just beginning to issue.

"Order your men to march on in to the woods over yonder out of gun-shot, and I will order out the carriage to drive to Berlin. If it be taken on the way I cannot help it, of course. But you must give it a start of a quarter of a mile. My comrade, Lieutenant McMahon, thinks he can cut his way through and I want to give him a chance to take the responsibility."

Trenck stared at him and then smiled.

"I admire your coolness, monsieur, but you will sacrifice your friend."

"That is his business and mine, general. Do you accept the terms?"

"Of course I do."

"A quarter of a mile start?"

"Certainly. My pandours can catch the carriage inside of two miles. Monsieur, we are alone, so you can speak freely. If you will render me this service I will pay you a thousand thalers at once."

"Have you the money with you, general?"

Trenck produced a small buckskin bag at once.

"Here it is. When I see my nephew drive out in the carriage I'll give it to you."

"Very good, general. Order your column to do as you have agreed."

The pandours were already filing by the gate, and the general shouted out some directions in Hungarian to the officer leading the column, who led the men off into the woods, till McMorris could see that they had gone on in good faith to the distance indicated.

Then he said to Trenck:

"Let us descend, monsieur. The bandage?"

The pandour chief seemed to be overjoyed at the successful termination of his negotiation, for he submitted to be blindfolded and led down with perfect docility.

In the court-yard they found the carriage all harnessed up, with four horses, and McMahon came up, saluted, and reported:

"All is in readiness, commandant. I await your orders."

"You will enter the carriage with the prisoner, sir, and endeavor to cut your way to Berlin," said McMorris quietly, noticing Trenck's eager and intent aspect of listening. "If you succeed, very good; if you fail, I take the responsibility. Are you ready to go?"

"I am ready," said McMahon.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DEVIL'S GULLY.

As McMahon spoke he exchanged a glance of intelligence with McMorris, who said to Trenck:

"Now, general, you are requested to depart. As to the money, you will please deposit it outside the gate as you mount your horse, and we will see to it."

"But my nephew," urged the pandour; "I have not seen him."

"You shall see him outside. Drop the money as soon as you recognize him."

"Very good, monsieur. Lead on."

McMorris led him out of the gate over the drawbridge, when he said:

"Now, general, remove the bandage."

Trenck instantly did so, and saw his horse standing by the flag, while the carriage, with O'Donohue on the box, was driving over the drawbridge at a walk. He looked in at the window as it passed, and saw his nephew, bound hand and foot, blindfolded and gagged, lying on the back seat, while McMahon sat on the front cushions.

He flung down the bag of gold, strode to his horse, sprung on its back, and roared out:

"To me, pandours, to me!"

Then he drew his saber and rushed at the leaders, just as O'Donohue started the carriage.

McMorris saw the trick and snatched a carbine from the nearest pandour.

A moment later he fired, and Trenck's horse came down head over heels, the pandour chief rolling on the ground as the carriage went off, full speed, tearing along the road.

McMorris picked up the bag of gold and tossed it inside the gate to the hussars.

"Help yourselves, men," he cried. "The Austrian has tried to cheat us, and I'm going to cheat him. Close the gates. Fire on any one coming near the walls."

The few hussars left uttered a loud cheer, and slammed the gate close, when they ran to the walls and opened fire on the Pandours, who came out of the woods, full gallop, as soon as they saw the coach start.

They had been compelled to give the vehicle a good quarter-mile start in the first instance, and now the fire of the hussars obliged them to make a circuit out of gun-shot, nearly doubling that distance, while Trenck, after the fall of his horse, was made a target of to such an extent, that he was obliged to abandon his dignity and run as hard as he could go to the shelter of his friends.

Meantime, the hussars, from the battlements, saw the coach disappear down the road in a whirl of dust, and heard the exultant yells of the pandours as they skirted through the woods overhauling it inch by inch, spite of their disadvantages.

As for McMorris, he mounted the highest tower of the castle which commanded a view of the entrance to the Devil's Gully Road, about half a mile off, and watched the pursuit with intense interest. He could see O'Donohue plying his lash, the coach rocking from side to side as it went, the foremost pandour flitting through the woods and gaining rapidly, while, a little way ahead, a dark chasm in the woods that covered the face of the country, showed the Devil's Gully.

That part of Bohemia contains a number of such gulleys, worn by the water, and resembling the prairie canyons of our own land, some of them quite inaccessible to any but a skillful mountaineer afoot; others, as the Devil's Gully, having a sort of path down the middle, hardly practicable for mounted men, unless they led their horses down by the bridle.

And it was down this road that O'Donohue proposed to drive a coach and four.

McMorris watched him with intense anxiety, and finally saw the carriage come to the mouth of the dark gap in the woods, halt and turn across the road, while a loud yell from the pandours told that they too saw the halt, and judged that an accident had happened.

Then he saw O'Donohue gather up his reins and get his horses into position for a rush, when the foremost pandour was less than two hundred yards behind.

A moment later came a flash from the coach window, and McMorris knew that McMahon had fired the pistol signal agreed on between them, that he was about to descend.

O'Donohue was seen to ply his whip violently, but the horses reared and refused to advance, and the pandours were still closing in.

McMorris trembled with anxiety as he thought of what would be the issue should the prisoner be retaken; but he could do nothing to help his friend, and saw that, in a few seconds more, the pandours would be up with the carriage.

They saw it too, and raised a wild shrill yell from the woods all round.

That yell effected what O'Donohue's whip had not yet done.

McMorris saw the horses give a leap and go tearing forward, then stop again, out of sight behind the trees, but leaving the coach still hanging at the edge of the declivity. There it remained several seconds more, till the pandours had actually dashed up, firing their pistols, when it suddenly lurched over and vanished into the gully.

The question remained, would it get down safely or be overturned and smashed to pieces? McMorris saw the pandours stop as they came up, in a confused group, and cluster round the head of the gully, looking down, but not daring to follow.

There they clustered till the road was black with men, and from their silence it became plain that the coach must have gone down safely or they would have yelled over a disaster.

Then, as he watched, he saw the gigantic figure of Trenck, mounted on a fresh horse, go tearing down the road, clear a way through the midst of the pandours, gesticulating wildly, and come to the declivity of the Devil's Gully.

McMorris looked before the castle, and not a pandour was to be seen.

He knew the unreliable character of these daring but easily stampeded irregulars, and an idea came into his mind, which he instantly executed.

His hussars had saddled their horses long be-

fore, under McMahon's orders, and the animals stood in line in the court.

He knew that twenty had gone with O'Donovan and the horse litter, conveying the ladies by the back forest path, which was inaccessible to the pandours.

These twenty, when McMahon arrived with the coach, if he got down safely, were to take Trenck to Gratz, while the princess and her ladies drove off to Schaffhausen.

He had thirty-two men remaining, and he resolved to make a dash with a part of these, trusting to the strength of the castle to repel any attack on the few that might be left inside.

So certain was he of the success of his plan, that he left only a sergeant and three men behind him, and rode out with the rest, twenty-eight in number, down the road to where he could see the black mass of pandours, clustered round the head of the Devil's Gully, like a swarm of bees.

As he came near, he saw that they had got off their horses and were preparing to lead them down the gully.

He rode silently on till within two hundred yards, quite unobserved, then drew his saber and shouted:

"Draw swords! Forward! gallop! charge!"

The hussars uttered a rousing cheer and dashed like a hurricane on their astounded and helpless adversaries.

The effect of that charge was magical.

There were about eight hundred pandours, as he knew, for Trenck had purposely exaggerated their numbers, and he had seen the whole column pass, while his own troop did not number thirty, all told.

But thirty determined horsemen can do a great deal, and the Prussian hussars of that day have never since been equaled.

And their foes were on foot, incumbered with the led horses, and taken by surprise.

In a moment the black mass took to flight, the horses stampeding, and went headlong down the Devil's Gully, when the scene of confusion and destruction became fearful, the hussars barely escaping by reining up at the top of the declivity.

The road went down at an angle of very nearly thirty degrees, and, when once the rush began, it was impossible for human power to check it.

Horses and men rolled over and over in a black, writhing mass, sliding down the steep path among jagged fragments of rock, amid a chorus of groans and shrieks that was quite appalling to listen to, even in the case of foes.

Far down at the bottom of the gully they could see a string of men leading their horses, but the rapidly-moving black mass swept on like a river, and finally reached the foremost of these men, bearing them away in inextricable ruin. In less than five minutes the whole force of the pandours was virtually blotted out of being as a military unit, while dead horses and men were strewn all the way along the steep slope of the Devil's Gully.

McMorris saw that a few men had managed to escape being drawn into the gully, and had climbed on their horses and galloped away into the woods; but he cared not to follow them, as he rode back to the castle.

He saw safety before him at last, galloped off to the shelter that had served him so well, entered it again, leaving twenty men behind, and issued from the back postern with a dozen more, to see what had become of the ladies on their way to Schaffhausen.

The forest path was five miles long, and he cleared it in half an hour by sharp trotting, emerging at last on a broad high-road, to see the coach coming up, its four horses reeking with sweat, while O'Donovan's party of hussars stood dismounted under some trees, awaiting the arrival of the vehicle.

Count Pollmeyer and two of the ladies were near O'Donovan; the third lady—the princess herself—could be seen reclining in the horse-litter.

McMorris was greeted by his men with a loud cheer as he rode up, and the hussars united in a ringing shout as O'Donovan pulled up his foaming horses and saluted his officer as if nothing had happened, with the simple remark:

"The prisoner's safe, your honor."

A moment later McMahon put out his head from a side window, got out of the carriage, and observed:

"Faith, White Maurice, we did the trick, but I don't want to try it again. It was just a shave we didn't lose a wheel one time, and if Brown Maurice hadn't kept the bastes up, it's little we'd ever have seen of old Ireland again. I'm wondering when the pandours'll be up. The gully gave us a good ten minutes' start, but they're behind us, I'm thinking."

McMorris shook his head.

"They'll trouble ye no more, Red Maurice. I caught them napping, charged them and drove them down Devil's Gully pell-mell. There's not fifty left fit to ride, I'll go bail."

McMahon looked up amazedly.

"Say that again."

McMorris did so, and McMahon took off his hat and made his friend a low bow.

"White Maurice, you're a cavalry officer born. It's well seen we were right when we told old Frits that we'd never surrender. Oh, what a pity! What a pity!"

"What do you mean?"

"That we daren't tell of it. We'd be promoted surely, we would."

McMorris frowned.

"Under no circumstances must it be spoken of, or the general will be exposed."

McMahon scratched his head.

"Devil blame the old rat if he can't find a way to tell the story himself. But never mind. What's the orders, commandant?"

McMorris beckoned his friend near, and whispered to him:

"Which will ye do—take Trenck or the castle? One of us has to ride to Gratz, but we can't go together."

"If ye'll let me go to Gratz, I'll be obliged, commandant. I have my reasons."

McMorris felt a little disappointed, but answered:

"Very well; you can go. I'll keep the castle. Report back as soon as ye can."

"I'll report to-morrow, commandant."

Then McMorris dismounted for the first time, and advanced to the horse-litter, where the Princess Amelia lay, looking pale and sad. He bowed low to her, as he said:

"If your highness will now please to descend and enter your carriage, my men will escort you to Schaffhausen."

She looked at him listlessly.

"You have succeeded, then? He is here?"

"The prisoner is here, your highness."

"And you are about to take him back to his dungeon to languish there for years?"

McMorris drew himself up.

"I am about to perform my duty, to preserve the reputation of your highness and General Ziethen, and to save both from ruin."

The princess bowed her head sadly. It seemed to McMorris as if she almost regretted that they had succeeded.

"You have done your duty," she replied, in a cold way; "I find no fault with you. But tell me, monsieur, is he hurt?"

McMorris closed his lips with a feeling of irritation, as he answered:

"I think not, your highness. He is a strong and desperate man, so that we had to bind him fast—"

"Don't let me see him," she interrupted in a low, agitated tone. "Monsieur, you are a noble man. I know I ought to be thankful. But you do not understand women—I—Don't let me see him. I might forget I am a princess—I—"

McMorris was startled to see that she was almost bursting into tears; but his quick tact told him what to do, so he hurried away to his men, ordered them to mount and ride forward round the carriage, so as to hide the vehicle from the view of the princess, while Trenck, still bound and gagged, was lifted out and carried back to the woods under McMahon's charge.

Then McMorris went back to the horse-litter and said, indifferently:

"The carriage is ready, if your highness will descend. Shall I call the ladies?"

"Do, do," she replied hurriedly, and the young hussar went off to Count Pollmeyer and the two young ladies who had been standing aloof from the party under a tree.

Pollmeyer held out his sound hand, and grasped that of McMorris warmly, ejaculating:

"Monsieur, I have heard it all from the men. You have done splendidly, and saved us all. If I can do anything for you I will."

Bertha Pollmeyer said nothing, but she gave him her little white hand and a glance from her blue eyes, that showed how she felt in the matter, as he kissed her hand and showed her to the carriage, the count following with Countess Hildegarde von Brunnen.

The princess descended from the litter, and slowly entered the carriage accompanied by the ladies when Count Pollmeyer drew back.

"With your highness' permission," he said, "I will ride on the box."

Then he whispered to Maurice:

"Pity the ladies on the way to Schaffhausen. Her highness will try them severely."

"With what, count?"

Pollmeyer shrugged his shoulders.

"Temper, my friend, temper. Nothing more. I have no fancy for it myself. Help me up to the box, for I've only one arm to use."

McMorris did as he desired and the carriage was about to drive off, when McMahon suddenly came trotting up, looking unusually handsome on his bay charger, which O'Donovan had brought round with him by the forest road.

McMahon came up and saluted as if he was about to deliver some important communication, but only said:

"Can I speak to ye a moment, commandant?"

"Certainly," said McMorris, surprised, and they went a little way off when Red Maurice whispered earnestly:

"Oh, for the love o' God, don't let them go away till I say good-bye to the dark one."

McMorris frowned slightly.

"You mean Pollmeyer's betrothed?"

"Devil a one I care, Maurice. I tell ye I'm clane distracted on her. I must say good-bye."

"Do so, then. But—discretion."

"Oh, discretion, of course. Ain't I cool as a piece of ice in the winter?"

And to prove it his eyes were blazing, his cheeks flushed, and he could hardly refrain from dashing in his spurs as the carriage moved slowly away. He let the vehicle proceed about fifty yards and then galloped after it, shouting:

"One moment, please."

Of course the driver pulled up and McMahon dashed to the window of the carriage, took off his cap, saluted profoundly, and said:

"The commandant directs me to say to your highness that the escort will follow at a quarter of a mile distance to avoid danger should any pandours attempt to follow you. I've the honor to bid your highness farewell."

The princess bowed coldly, but McMahon had got all he wanted. He had seen Countess Hildegarde, and she had given him a glance out of her dark eyes that set his heart beating like a trip-hammer while she smiled her adieu.

The carriage went on; the hussar returned to his friend, and McMorris observed dryly:

"Well, ye've had your interview, and what better are ye off for it?"

McMahon curled his mustache.

"I've pl'ased myself, Mr. McMorris, and that's all I wanted. D'y'e think ye're to have the ladies all to yerself? I'll not deny that the Countess Bertha's pretty; but she can't bould a candle to my Hildegarde."

"Your Hildegarde! Why, ye murdering Tip, she belongs to another man altogether."

"And d'y'e think a Tip man would stop for that! Faith, McMorris, ye may do that way in Galway, but up in Tipperary we don't count a lady anybody's girl till she's fast married."

"And you seriously mean to say you're going to try and make love to Countess Hildegarde with nothing but a hussar's saber to give her for a dowry?"

"I mane that a Tip never gives up the game, Mr. McMorris, till he bears the praste give the bride's blessing. Sure if it wasn't for taking that baste of a Trenck back to Gratz we might both have an the iligant time escorting the ladies to Schaffhausen. Couldn't we?"

"Red Maurice," replied his friend still more dryly, "you're crazy, stark crazy. Get off with ye to Gratz, and mind ye don't let him off on the way."

Red Maurice thus recalled to his duty obeyed and led off his party of twenty troopers with the horse-litter containing Trenck in the center, when McMorris slowly returned to the castle after sending a dozen hussars to escort the princess to Schaffhausen and bring back O'Donovan, who was still driving the carriage.

The young officer felt so secure now, that he rode back, with only a single orderly behind him, through the forest path, and had almost reached the postern gate in rear of the castle, when he was surprised to see a horseman, in the well known garb of the pandours, struggle out of the woods into the path before him, and heard the cracking of dry sticks that told of other horses following, as the pandour called out something in the Hungarian tongue to those behind him.

The man's back was still turned to McMorris, and the hussar immediately realized the danger he was in.

Some pandours must have escaped, and he had but a single man with him, while twenty of his hussars were in the castle, with no one but a sergeant in command.

CHAPTER XIX.

TRENCK.

For a moment the blood rushed to the heart of the Irish hussar, as it will to that of the bravest at such times of surprise.

The next moment he turned in his saddle and saw that his orderly had pulled up, while the look in the man's face showed that he was, for the nonce, bewildered.

Then his coolness returned as he called to mind McMahon's motto:

"A cavalry officer never surrenders."

He remained watching till he saw a string of pandours, nearly fifty in number, come out of the woods and go toward the castle postern, not once looking behind them, though he sat on his horse in full sight.

And the third pandour to come out was Trenck himself.

Out of the fifty, at least one third had their heads bandaged, arms in slings, or bore other tokens of the injury received in the Devil's Gully; but the rest seemed to be unhurt, and old Trenck was riding still another fresh horse.

The pandour chief seemed to be suffering like the rest, though none of his limbs were bound up, and every now and then they could hear him give a low order in Hungarian to his men, at which they closed up silently.

When the last man was out, McMorris reined his horse back into the forest, and beckoned to his orderly, to whom he said:

"Ride back softly till you reach the road. Then gallop to the escort, and bring them back to the path. Halt within pistol-shot, and be

ready to give a volley and charge when you see them come out."

The man hesitated.

"But you, my officer, I cannot leave you."

McMorris looked at him amazed. The honest fellow's eyes were full of tears, and the young officer was touched as he answered kindly:

"Listen, hussar. Do you think we two could beat 'ose fifty?"

"No, lieutenant, but we can ride away."

"I don't intend to ride away. I'm going to kill or capture that Trenck. Now be off quickly."

The hussar no longer hesitated, but made his salute and rode away through the path, looking back frequently to see if his lieutenant were still in sight.

Maurice waited till he heard him begin to trot as he turned a winding corner of the path, and then urged on his own horse after the pandours at a slow walk, a pistol drawn in his hand, his eyes glancing from bush to bush ahead.

The pandours had gone out of sight, and he knew that he was within a mile of the little postern, at which was stationed a sentry.

On purpose to guard against possible surprise, this sentry had been instructed to open to none till he had inspected them carefully through a loop-hole and knew who they were.

After a few minutes' walk he came in sight of the tail end of the long column, and saw in front, rising, the steep descent of the bluff on which Konigstein was built.

The postern opened out of a secret passage in the rock, artfully concealed from view without by dead bushes, and the only danger that he feared was that the sentry might be dilatory at his watch.

He saw the pandour chief go hunting round the base of the cliff till he came to the dried bushes which screened the postern, and then Maurice thought it was time to act for himself, if ever.

He walked his horse boldly on, took a second pistol from his holster and pursued his way till so near to the nearest pandour that the man turned to look.

At that moment Maurice leveled his pistol, shot his foe dead, and immediately rode forward, pointing the other at the back of the next man.

To appreciate the confusion that followed, it must be remembered that the forest path was barely wide enough for a horse to turn, and that the young hussar's retreat was free, while his foes were jammed together already.

The second man uttered a yell of terror and tried to turn, when Maurice dropped him with his second pistol, and rode on to the side of the dead pandour's horse.

He saw that the soldier had holsters and a carbine on his saddle, and he managed to get out a pistol and shoot a third man before the flurried pandours had well got over their terror.

Then at last they turned and opened a wild aimless fire into the bushes on each side, where they evidently fancied their enemies were concealed.

The noise and confusion increased; but the pandours seemed afraid to advance, till he heard the thundering voice of Trenck, roaring:

"Forward, forward! Out your way out."

Then the pandours uttered a yell of terror, and Maurice knew it was time for him to get up and run his best, which he accordingly did.

He rode a good charger and plied his spurs with energy; but the pandours came on nearly as fast, in a frenzy of desperation at the foes they imagined to be all round them, firing carbines and pistols into the woods, and frightened still more at the noise of their own weapons, which they attributed to their enemies.

And when Maurice came to the mouth of the forest path, he was less than fifty yards ahead of his foes, while the expected escort on which he had counted was nowhere in sight yet.

He had no further resource but flight, and on he rode, down the way of Schaffhausen, till he heard a loud yell behind him and saw that Trenck had rallied his pandours on the broad highway and was trying to get them into some sort of order again, seeing that they were in the open ground with no enemy round them.

As for Maurice, he dashed on till he saw the dust of the escort, and rode up to meet them, just in time to prevent them from exposing their small numbers to the gaze of Trenck.

Then came the question of what further to do. The hussars had halted under some trees by the roadside; the pandours were grouped at the edge of the forest, and McMorris reflected that every moment they could be detained there added to the distance which separated them from the carriage of the princess and the horse-litter containing the prisoner.

Suddenly he saw the pandours divide into two parties, one of which came straight down the road on which he was, while the other went off on the very road which he had seen McMahon take nearly an hour before.

The party coming toward him was about twenty strong, the other half as numerous again, while two horsemen remained to watch the forest. Maurice backed his men into shelter, and as the pandours came up greeted them with a volley, which was instantly returned, with

The Mad Hussars.

and set on both flanks, but the last for the Hussars, as the pandours immediately wheeled and galloped back a short distance, when they began to fire off their carbines in the aimless way so common to skirmishers, who seem to glory in using up ammunition and making a noise for the good of the country.

For a while Maurice allowed the fire to be returned, and then he checked it, for he wanted to see what was going on, when the smoke did not obscure vision.

His first glance was across the fields to the road on which McMorris had gone.

The whole body of pandours was coming back at a trot, the attention of their leader attracted by the rapid firing down the side road.

"So far so good," he thought. "They'll all come this way; but if so, how shall I stop them from pursuing the carriage of the princess? To capture her would be to us a worse disgrace than to capture Trenck himself. We could never face his Majesty after that."

But how was it to be prevented?

He had ten unwounded and two wounded men remaining, of whom one had just had his horse killed, while more than fifty men were coming down the road, full trot, scattering bullets as they came.

He had to make up his mind quickly, so he told the wounded man who had no horse to get into the ditch by the roadside and cover himself up with brushwood, while, with the rest of the men, he took up a position and opened a rapid fire on the column of pandours, as they came in a mass, and had the satisfaction of seeing that he had emptied several saddles.

But his opportunity had gone for a stampede, now that the smallness of his force was plainly revealed to the enemy, and Trenck drove his men at last into making a charge, before which the little squad of hussars could do nothing but flee. And, once started on the back track, it is not possible to stop the best cavalry.

McMorris had the mortification of finding that his men had got out of hand and were running away, full speed.

The road before them was clear, but he dreaded to see, at every hill, the form of the carriage, still lumbering along.

Two miles passed away in this headlong flight, when the shouts of his pursuers grew fainter behind him and he saw that they were pulling up.

He shouted to his men, and at last succeeded in stopping them, so as to halt on the top of a hill commanding a view on both sides.

Then he looked forward on the road, and to his horror discovered that the carriage, with the ladies, was less than a quarter of a mile ahead, bowling leisurely along, while the pandours in rear were not more than the same distance, but strung along the road in parties.

Trenck was in advance, riding to and fro, his sword waving, getting his men into order, and McMorris judged him to be preparing for a further advance.

That he was correct in this, appeared in a few minutes more, when the whole body came on again, at a trot.

McMorris glanced at the coach.

In the interval it had gained another quarter mile, and a mile further on, rose a hill, on the other side of which the coach would be hidden once more.

He took his resolution instantly.

"Hussars, dismount!" he said. "We must hold this hill, till the carriage is out of sight."

The men jumped off their horses and opened a rapid fire on the pandours, throwing them into wild confusion as they came up the hill, but not succeeding in stopping their advance.

The hussar horses were sheltered from the return fire by the crest of the hill, and before the pandours reached them the soldiers had captured a dozen saddles.

Then, when Trenck was less than two hundred yards away, McMorris shouted:

"Hussars, mount! Forward! Charge!"

In another moment eleven hussars charged thirty or forty pandours, assisted by the slope of the hill, and drove them in headlong rout, despite the efforts of Trenck, who raged like a madman, and met McMorris fairly.

The hussar evaded the rush of his gigantic foe, and, as he passed by, leaned half off his horse and slashed Trenck's charger on the hock, hamstringing the animal.

Then he passed on with his men; had the satisfaction of seeing that the pandours were thoroughly demoralized, missing their leader, and halted his men to go back where Trenck sat on his disabled horse, alone among his foes.

Once more the Irish hussar had turned the tables on his enemy, and as he rode back he called out warningly:

"Surrender, baron, surrender! It is but the fortune of war! Surrender!"

Trenck glared savagely and spurred his horse to close, but the animal only shuddered and limped forward on three legs a few steps, then halted and tried to sink down.

The hussars came back, leading their comrade, and McMorris called again:

"Do you surrender, baron, or must we kill you? Decide quickly."

The pandour cleft ground his teeth; but he

saw that resistance was useless and yielded out:

"I surrender to force, but if my men had but followed me— There!"

He threw down his sword with an oath, and McMorris observed politely:

"I accept the surrender, sir. Come on with us."

"My horse is lame," growled Trenck.

"So much the better for us; you will not be able to run away."

Trenck scowled and dismounted from his horse, observing grimly:

"You'll have to give me another horse, and then you'll see whether I can run away."

McMorris laughed.

"I suppose you take us for idiots but I can assure you we are not. We will give you a fresh horse, but you will be tied to it, and I am going to take you to Gratz to keep the company of a gentleman you know."

Trenck made no answer but to glare round him in all directions as if looking for a way of escape.

He was as powerful as his nephew and able to cope with any two ordinary men, but everywhere he looked he encountered cocked carbines and a circle of hussars watching him.

At last he growled out:

"What do you want me to do?"

"To hold up your hands to be tied," said McMorris quietly. "Come, baron, be reasonable. I know you're a strong man; but I'm going to take you to Gratz."

Trenck held out his hands.

"Bind me," he said shortly.

McMorris watched him closely and did not like the expression of his face. The man could not keep a certain crafty look out of his eyes and McMorris caught one of his glances sent down the road toward the fleeing remnant of the pandours.

Turning in his saddle, he saw that they had rallied about a mile off and halted. In a moment he perceived that the pandour chief was meditating treachery and determined to foil him. He ordered two of his men to dismount and tie the hands of Trenck secretly behind him while two others covered the prisoners with their cocked carbines.

Trenck scowled but held out his hands in front growling out:

"Fools, do you think I can get away! Tie them that way or not at all."

"You'll tie them behind him," said McMorris in a stern tone. "No nonsense, baron. I'll not stand it from you. You can escape binding if you will give your parole not to escape."

"I'll not give it. Keep me if you can," said Trenck spitefully. "My men will rescue me as it is."

"We'll see about that. Put your hands behind you, baron."

"I'll not do it."

McMorris made a sign to a rawboned corporal whose horse was behind Trenck and the corporal gathered up his reins understanding the signal.

"Baron," cried the hussar sharply, "for the last time will you submit to be bound?"

"No," roared Trenck defiantly. "Bind me if you can, all of you."

"Ride over him," cried McMorris. "Break him down. Show him a horse is stronger than a giant."

As he spoke he made his horse rear up before the pandour, the corporal did the same and up went all the hussars, their horses pawing the air and coming down on the hard road with a clashing and crash that completely overwhelmed Trenck.

In the twinkling of an eye his confidence vanished, as he saw the horses closing in, and feared he would be trodden into a mummy.

"I surrender!" he roared. "Good God! gentlemen, do you want to kill me?"

"Certainly!" cried McMorris, fiercely, but at the same time restraining his horse. "You deserve to be killed, and, by heavens! killed you shall be in one minute if you stir another finger to resist. Advance, Meyer and Kapp. Bind him securely. Tie his hands behind him, and see that he has no chance of wrenching loose. Corporal Bottheimer, if the prisoner stirs, cut him down, and see you kill him dead. Now, baron, we'll see who's master here!"

And the giant was completely cowed, as all giants must be when they meet with a force that exceeds their own so far as to be irresistible.

Trenck, accustomed to handle men like children, was terrified at the circle of battering hoofs, and stood, quiet as a lamb, while the two hussars tied him fast.

When McMorris saw that he was incapable of further resistance, he made four hussars lift the captive giant on a horse, tying him with his feet under the animal's belly, and making him secure to the pommel and cantle of the saddle.

Then he gave orders to his men to close in round the prisoner, and they leisurely took their way toward Schaffhausen, on the trail of the carriage which had gone out of sight during the skirmish.

McMorris began to feel that the most difficult part of his task was coming yet, and he needed

the cool head and strong hand of his fellow-countryman O'Donohue with him, to get past the pandours with their chief a prisoner.

CHAPTER XX.

THE SIEGE.

THEY rode leisurely on for about five miles on the road to Schaffhausen, when they were surprised to see the carriage standing by a little house, while fresh horses were being put to it.

As they came in sight of the post-house from the top of the hill, they saw the coach bowl off at a rapid pace, and almost immediately after two hussars came back full trot toward them.

"Tis O'Donohue," said McMorris to himself. "He sees there is no further danger to the coach, with fresh horses, and is coming back to report."

In fact, in ten minutes later, O'Donohue, with a German hussar named Pompfleldt, came up and saluted, as if nothing had happened, the Irishman observing:

"Count Pollmeyer tould us to come back to ye, liffenant, and say that all the pandours in Austria c'u'dn't ketch him now, unless they'd get relays, as he did. He'll find out the alarm, sir, from Shaffhausen, that the inimy's up."

McMorris ordered his little squad of men to close up, and turned to ride back, beckoning O'Donohue to ride with him in front alone.

"Brown Maurice," he said, "we've taken Trenck, the pandour, and we've got to get him into the castle, a prisoner; if not cutting our way to Gratz with him."

O'Donohue scratched his head.

"Faix, liffenant, it's aisler said than done. Have ye heard the news, sir?"

"What news?"

"That the inimy's up, sir. We heard it at the post-house. They've been b'atin' up the king's quarters all along the line; and they do say, sir, that they've b'aten the king himself at Prague."

McMorris started.

"Where did ye hear it, O'Donohue?"

"At that post-house, sir."

"But it can't be true."

"Divil a one of me knows, sir, but the count tould the post-boys to drive fast to the next station, and the ladies was frightened to death, sir."

"No wonder," muttered Maurice. "The country is in sore peril and this insolent adventurer put in the way of escaping by a Princess of Prussia! Thank God McMahon's got him safely on the way to Gratz."

Aloud he said:

"Don't tell any one of the report, O'Donohue. I don't believe it and it will demoralize the men. See, yonder are the pandours again. Now for a charge to cut our way through."

Indeed they saw on the next hill the group of pandours who had been hovering on their rear and the way in which the men were clustered showed that they intended to dispute the passage.

The ascent toward them was very gentle, and Maurice determined to charge them, as the safest way to pass.

He knew that more than half the pandours were wounded and the rest ready to run if a resolute front were shown.

He put his little squad in motion at a walk, advanced in line till within long gun-shot of the pandours, and then began to trot.

The result was that the enemy opened a fire with nervous trepidation, and began to break up and fall back.

The hussars kept up their rapid trot with drawn sabers, and burst into a gallop and cheer at the same time.

The pandours immediately broke and fled, the hussars following in perfect order till they had driven them a full mile, when all semblance of order was lost among the enemy, who began to halt individually and fire off their carbines, only to resume their flight as soon as they found themselves alone. In this way they were driven to the entrance of the forest path, when they turned and fled down the highway toward the Devil's Gully. McMorris rode to the path and turned his horse.

"Brown Maurice," he said, "this path will only hold one at a time. Dye think ye can take the prisoner into the castle?"

"Yes, your honor."

"How many men do you want?"

"Pompfleldt and myself, your honor. He's a good boy, if he is a Dutchman."

"Very good. Take him in, and remember I shall hold you responsible for his safety."

O'Donohue grunted.

"Faith, your honor, av he gives any trouble, it's little I'd mind givin' him a taste of the carbine, as I did his nevy, bad luck to him."

"Very good. Take him along, and the wounded men with you."

They had picked up on the road the hussar who had lost his horse, and he was riding double with the other wounded man.

A few moments later the prisoner and his guards had vanished, in the forest path, and McMorris was left with ten men, well mounted, to cope with about fifteen unwounded pandours, who had halted down the road.

were trying to make up their minds to charge back.

McMorris turned his men.

"Hussars, there are the enemy. Who will follow me to drive them off and give our men time to get into the castle?"

The rawboned corporal saluted.

"We're all ready, my officer."

"Then follow me."

They rode toward the fifteen, who halted like magic, and began to turn their horses to flee.

McMorris waved his sword, and galloped on a few yards, when the enemy fled like hares, and the hussars completed their discomfiture by a volley of carbine-shots.

Then they halted in the road, and McMorris began to survey the situation.

All around him, behind the forest, the country was perfectly peaceful and quiet, and it seemed to him impossible that the news brought him by O'Donohue could be true.

The Austrians advancing, and the king beaten at Prague? It could not be, surely.

Only the day before the troops were in winter-quarters, the Prussians in full possession of Saxony and Bohemia, without a sign of an enemy on Prussian soil.

Frederick seemed to have conquered his foes, as if they had been children.

But if the Austrians were advancing, it bode him to be very careful.

Already Trenck had nearly surprised him, and captured his nephew, when McMorris thought the Austrians unusually careless.

And there was no question that they had all the men they needed. Every man in Prussia knew at the outset of the war that the odds were three to one, and they had not been lessened yet.

Thinking over all these matters, the young hussar rode back to the forest path, dismounted his men to cover it from attack till he judged that O'Donohue must have about reached the castle, and waited to see what the pandours would do.

He could see them hovering about on the road, and noticed that their wounded stragglers were going off toward the Devil's Gully.

And then, just as he was making up his mind to ride back, he heard the sound of a gun in the direction of the castle, closely followed by a second and third, and finally developing into a brisk cannonade.

The hussars looked at each other and their leader, but not one exhibited symptoms of agitation. These men had fallen into the iron habits of discipline prevalent in the service, and looked mutely to the officer in whom they confided implicitly.

The young Irishman's heart swelled with pride as he thought to himself:

"With such men I can go anywhere, and do anything on earth."

He listened to the cannonade till it became regular, and at last mounted his men and filed them into the forest path at a walk, which he kept up for a quarter of a mile, when he started at a brisk trot and rode on to the rear postern without meeting a soul.

Arrived there, he was admitted by the sentry, who wore the usual stolid aspect of a Prussian soldier, and who replied to his question as to what had happened:

"Nothing of consequence, my officer. I relieved Hussar Busch twenty minutes ago."

"What is the firing I hear in front?"

"The Austrians, I believe, my officer. At least the big gun said so."

"And what have you been doing?"

"Mounting guard, my officer."

"Are the Austrians bombarding the castle?"

"Yes, my officer."

"And are we replying?"

"No, my officer."

McMorris could not restrain a smile at the stolid composure of this solitary sentry, who was compelled to listen to a cannonade, and could not tell how it might result.

"You don't appear to mind it," he said.

"No, my officer. Why should I? Sergeant Kroll is responsible."

"And suppose the castle is taken? What would you do then, hussar?"

The sentry looked puzzled a moment.

"I don't understand you, my officer."

"Well, suppose the Austrians came running in at this postern, what would you do?"

The hussar saluted by slapping his carbine.

"The door will be closed, my officer, as soon as the men are inside, and I should shoot down the Austrians as fast as they came."

McMorris laughed.

"You'll do for the duty you're on. What's your name?"

"Fritz Stock, my officer."

"Indeed? Have you a father in the Guards?"

"Yes, my officer, an invalid, in Major Ballero's service."

"I thought so. Good-by, Fritz."

They rode on up a stone passageway into the stables of the castle, which were all under the level of the glacis, and McMorris directed his men to unsaddle and report for duty.

Then he went up to the court-yard, and thence to the ramparts of the castle, where he saw that a strong Austrian force of cavalry, chiefly hus-

sars, was gathered in the woods outside, while a battery of six light guns was playing on the walls, within full view.

Sergeant Kroll, a grim old hussar, with a long white mustache, stood on the ramparts stolidly surveying the enemy, while the rest of the men were scattered on the defenses, not firing a shot, seemingly secure of the powers of the fortress.

In fact, the light missiles of the six-pounders were powerless to effect a breach in the ramparts, faced, as these were, with four feet of stone, and backed by a good thirty or thirty-five feet of earth inside.

As soon as Kroll perceived his officer he saluted stiffly and remained standing.

"Well, Kroll, what's your report?" asked McMorris. "How long since these fellows have been here?"

"About half an hour, my officer."

"And why don't you fire on them?"

"No need, my officer. They cannot breach these walls in a week. If your honor orders it we can fire."

"Is the magazine full?"

"Yes, your honor."

"And the guns—are they in good order?"

Kroll hesitated.

"I don't know, my officer. The fact is, the men are not used to siege work—"

"They'll have to learn, Kroll. Load up all the guns on the towers, and train them on that battery."

Then he went from place to place, helping to load the guns—principally twenty-four-pounders—with which the castle had been armed years before; trained them out of the loop-holes himself, and assigned a trooper to each, with directions to fire when he heard the order.

It was necessary to demoralize the enemy to make them relinquish their attack.

McMorris saw, from the suddenness with which the hussars had followed the pandours, that the whole movement had probably been concerted long before, and he began to believe O'Donohue's story.

At last, when every man in his command, to the number of thirty-two, stood behind a gun, linstock in hand, McMorris shouted:

"Fire!"

A salvo of thirty-two heavy guns, loaded with balls and grapeshot, went tearing through the Austrian battery, dismounting cannon, killing horses and plowing a broad lane through the dark mass of dismounted horsemen that had gathered in rear of the battery, emboldened by the silence within the castle.

In another moment a headlong stampede of every hussar in the vicinity followed, and McMorris saw that the annoying battery was silent. Only two out of eight guns remained intact, and not a man had dared to stay by them.

McMorris ordered the guns loaded again, and began to fire into the woods, with the result of clearing the front of the castle of its foes, when he observed to Kroll:

"You see, sergeant, there was no need to have them annoying us all the time."

"No, my officer; but if I had driven them away at first, we should have lost all this fun."

"True, Kroll. It has turned out well. Let me see. Is there any corn in the castle?"

"In the old granary, lieutenant, in the north tower, there is about enough for two feeds to our horses."

"See them fed at once, Kroll. We shall have to leave this castle."

The sergeant's face beamed with satisfaction, as he asked hopefully:

"Are we to cut our way out, my officer?"

"No. We'll go by the postern. Withdraw all the men from sight. I'm going to try a rose on these Austrians. We are not expected to stay here till we eat our horses."

"By no means, my officer."

Kroll hurried off to the granary, and McMorris inspected all the defenses of the castle, coming to the conclusion that it was impregnable to cavalry or infantry, and would require heavy guns and mines to make any impression on its defenses.

And he had formed a plan so audacious that he laughed to himself at the absurd likelihood of its success.

CHAPTER XXL

THE SALLY.

The day was declining by the time the Austrians had retired fully from the castle, when McMorris called O'Donohue to one side, and said to him:

"Brown Maurice, what do you think of these Austrian hussars, now you've seen them?"

O'Donohue grinned.

"Faith, your honor, an' I don't think much of 'em. I'll go bail, if Lieutenant McMahon and Black Maurice was back, we'd give them a worse scare than the pandours got at the Devil's Gully."

"And why shouldn't we two do it, Brown Maurice?"

O'Donohue hesitated.

"Sure, yer honor, I can't help bein' a soft-hearted fool, so I can't, and I don't want to chafe them out of the fun, after the illigant

foight they misased to-day, when yer honor bato the pandours so nicely. Wu'dn't it be betther to wait for 'em, your honor?"

"But I can't be sure when they'll be back."

"They'll be back to-morrow, your honor, I'll bail. It's not a gentleman of the blood of the McMahons that's goin' to miss a fcight."

"Maybe he'll get all the fighting he wants, and more, too, on his own road, O'Donohue."

"True for you, sir, but I'll go bail, if he does, he'll come through all right, sir."

"I'm afraid not, O'Donohue. If the enemy are on a general advance, he may run into a strong party, with his prisoner to guard, and may suffer severely, if not lose the captive."

O'Donohue scratched his head.

"Av I thought that, sir—"

"Well, what?"

"I'd say, let's go out and look for him."

"That's what I'm thinking of myself, Brown Maurice, and I want to hear what you think of the plan."

"Sure it's 'asy enough, sir."

"Well, how would you do it?"

"Just feed the horses and ride out, sir. If the Austrians get in the way, we'll just charge 'em, sir. Sure they'll run like sheep every time we shake a saber."

McMorris smiled.

"Don't be too sure of that. These fellows outside are regular soldiers, like our own—not mere pandours, paid with plunder. Then they are at least a hundred to ten."

"And weren't the pandours fifty to one, bad luck to 'em? But the boys tell me ye went through them 'asy, sir. An' wasn't I sorry I missed it, sir?"

"You had an exciting time of your own, I think. I watched you till you went over the edge of the gully, and thought they had you at one time."

"Troth and it was a close shave, sir; but thanks be to St. Patrick and the last touch of a whip at the right time, we got started at last, and after that, sir, bedad I didn't have time to think anything; for I had to keep the bastees out of the way of the coach, and 'twas less than no time when we rowled into the road and left the murderin' thieves half a mile off—starin' like stuck pigs, so they was."

"Well, O'Donohue, these hussars outside are different fellows from them. It won't do to ride out in front. Besides that, we shall be in-cumbered with another prisoner."

"And w'y'd ye take him along, sir?"

"Of course. If we abandon the castle, we must not set him free."

"Divil resave the set him free, yer honor. It's a fine settin' free I'd give him."

"And what would you give him?"

O'Donohue grinned.

"Just blow his brains out, sir. Sure he'd do the same by us any time."

"In fair fight, yes; but not as a captive. You're an unmitigated savage, O'Donohue."

"Maybe I am, sir; but I'd not take that black divil along."

"Very well. Your wits are good—devise a plan by which to keep him. He's locked up in a cell now."

"Why not l'ave him there, sir?"

"But who'll take care of him?"

O'Donohue scratched his head—his usual way of procuring ideas—an efficacious one with him, for he suddenly burst out:

"I have it, sir."

"Welt."

"L'ave him here with Fritz Stock and two other fellers to keep the castle."

"Well."

"Three's enough, sir—one for each relief. The enemy can't get in widout breakin' a hole in the wall, and one's as good as twenty."

"It might do; but the enemy might put up ladders and try to get in."

"Divil a ladder, sir. We'll rig up dummies to look like sogers, and they'll believe we're all here still."

"I see—go on."

"And we'll slip out the back door and ride off to meet Lieutenant McMahon, and then we'll go back all together, and bate the Austrians from Derry to Cork, so we will."

McMorris nodded.

"Your idea is the same as my own, but the trouble of guarding Trenck was in the way of it. I think it's safe to leave him here, locked up, for a few days. Go and get the men you think you can rely on to stay."

"Fritz Stock, Max Krauker and Peter Schlaeger, sir. They're all good boys, and they'd as soon brain old Trenck with the butt of a carbine as not av he got impudent."

"Go and prepare, then."

O'Donohue saluted, and left the room; while McMorris went round to look at his horses, which he found in excellent condition, for they had done but little work lately and their last feed had been bountiful.

Then he

your parole not to escape I will give you the freedom of the castle. I am going away."

Trenck looked up with flashing eye.

"Ahal you think I don't know the reason. You are afraid of my friends. I heard the canon. In a month I shall be free, for the Austrian troops will be in Berlin."

"Then you decline to give your parole?"

"I do. You can act as you please."

"Very good, baron. Farewell. I may as well say that your nephew is safe back in Gratz by this time."

Trenck laughed.

"Ay, ay, you triumph now, but my turn will come soon. When I am free, Europe will ring with the story of your king's sister—"

"Baron," interrupted McMorris, sternly, "the man who repeats the story is a scoundrel and a coward. You and your nephew have traded long enough on a woman's weakness, and now I promise you that you shall never leave this place alive."

Trenck glared at him, but made him no answer; for he felt a little ashamed.

McMorris turned on his heel and left the corridor, when he collected his men for the night sally, and called up Fritz Stock, with the companions O'Donohue had selected.

All three men were stolid looking white-heads, but trim and neat in dress.

McMorris gave them injunctions to take care the prisoner did not escape, and to shoot him if he offered any resistance, adding:

"I trust him and the castle to you three. Do you think you can take care of both?"

Fritz Stock saluted.

"As long as we have enough to eat, sir."

"I leave you forty days' rations for three."

"And the horses, your honor?"

"You will not need them. We shall take them with us."

Max Krauker saluted.

"Please, my officer?"

"Well?"

"Can't we have a little firing practice on the Austrians?"

"All you like, so long as you don't reveal your small numbers."

"Thank your honor."

Then the whole garrison, to the number of thirty, excluding Fritz Stock, Krauker, Schlagler and three wounded hussars, fled slowly out of the back postern and rode out by the forest path into the high road.

They approached it cautiously, O'Donohue riding ahead to reconnoiter, and it was well they did so, for they heard the buzz of many voices as they came near it, and O'Donohue whispered his chief:

"The road's full of cavalry, your honor, goin' to the Devil's Gully."

McMorris halted his little troop and rode out to the margin of the path.

In the darkness of night the entrance to the forest was unnoticed, and he saw on the road before him the regularly waving shakos of a large force of cavalry, who were moving on at a steady walk, conversing in a way that showed they were totally unaware of the proximity of an enemy.

He heard the language spoken, and it seemed to be German, with the soft accent of the southern kingdoms perfectly distinct from the harsh, guttural way in which a Prussian or Hanoverian converses.

Every now and then an officer called out an order to close up and stop talking, which produced a lull for a while, after which the buzz was resumed, as loud as ever.

McMorris kept himself hidden in the shade of the wood till a good quarter of an hour had passed, and still the cavalry kept passing.

Then he heard the heavy rumble and clanking of guns, and several field-pieces went by at a walk, followed by their ammunition caissons.

Then came a gap as the last gun passed, and he rode out to look down the road, when he heard more horses coming, and saw a second dark mass advancing.

For a moment he was turning to ride back, and then reflected that, if he had seen the enemy, they must see him, so he resolved to put a bold face on it and ride forward by the roadside, as if he had been sent back with an order from the column in front.

He walked his horse coolly on, and, as he had expected, no one in the next column spoke to him, though he took in every particular as he passed.

The men were all Austrian Hussars, with tall caps and lofty pompons, and they had put on their thick pelisses to shield them from the chill of the night air.

A swallow-tailed flag at the head of the column, with a numerous staff, indicated the presence of a general officer, and it was followed by several regiments, till McMorris had counted five.

Then he rode up to a straggler that he saw coming in the rear, and asked him sternly:

"What regiment do you belong to, fellow?"

The hussar recognized the tones of a cultivated voice, and said bumbly.

"O'neinstein's regiment, my officer."

"What brigade, sir?"

"Nadasti's brigade, sir. Please, your honor,

don't be hard on me. I only stopped to water my horse, and I'll never—"

"No words, fellow. Report to your captain at once. What brigade is in rear of you?"

"None, my officer," returned the frightened hussar. "Nadasti had the advance, yesterday; so we are in rear to day."

"Who has the advance to-day, then?"

"I don't know, my officer. Stay. Yes. It is the Jellachick Brigade. Nadasti is third, and Lichtenstein must be second. Can I go now, my colonel?"

McMorris seemed to be hesitating.

"No," he said, "you can come with me. I want an orderly to do some duty to-night, and I'll save you from punishment in the morning. Follow me."

The hussar saluted humbly, and McMorris rode off on the trail of the cavalry division that had just passed, till he came to the mouth of the forest path, where the dark figure of a horseman stood motionless.

"Is it thou?" he asked in Irish, and the voice of O'Donohue immediately replied:

"It is I, my chief. I feared you were taken."

"No. Call out the men. I have made a prisoner and some discoveries."

Then, turning to the astounded hussar, who had not understood a word, he said:

"You don't understand Hungarian, do you?"

"No, my officer," was the relieved reply. "I am a Silesian, driven out by the cursed Prussians."

"What's your name?"

"Jacob Dietz, your honor."

McMorris heard his men coming out, and made no answer till they had completely surrounded the unsuspecting Silesian, when he remarked in a quiet conversational way:

"The cursed Prussians did not drive you out, Jacob. You ran away to escape the draft, and now we're going to make a good Prussian of you. How many men are there in your column, how many guns, and where are they all going to-night?"

Jacob stammered and stuttered.

"I—I don't know—who—you are."

"A Prussian officer, Jacob, who will cut your head off if you don't answer. O'Donohue, take this fellow's head off for me when I tell you to strike."

O'Donohue quietly drew his saber and rode close to the trembling Jacob, as if measuring his distance, when the Silesian cried:

"I surrender! For God's sake don't kill me. We have three brigades and ten thousand men, with twenty-four guns, my officer; as I told you."

"Where are they going?"

"To Newmarket, captain, to fight the king."

"Who commands them?"

"Prince Charles of Lorraine, my captain."

"How many men has he?"

"How can a poor soldier tell, sir? I don't know. I have heard say—"

"What have you heard say?"

"That he has at least ninety thousand men and that Dann has driven the king out of Silesia, so that he has but thirty thousand left, with the French waiting for him. Oh, my officer, don't kill me, and I'll tell you all I know."

"Do so then. Where have you come from?"

"From Prague, captain."

"Have you met any of our men to-night?"

"No, my officer."

McMorris heaved a sigh of relief as he realized that his friend had probably escaped the peril.

"Have you passed Gratz?" he asked.

"No, my officer. That is away to the right. We slipped through a gap in your lines."

"Where was this?"

"On the other side of Konigstein. We heard a great deal of firing, and supposed it was General Loudon's cuirassier division."

"Is he with you too?"

"He was to take the road by the castle, sir, with a brigade of Tollendal's Hussars, to scout the country before him."

"How many men has he got?"

"About as many as we have, captain."

McMorris started slightly at the news. Twenty thousand cavalry between him and the king; while Ziehen had less than five scattered up and down a fifty-mile line on picket.

Decidedly the campaign was in danger, and he must get to Gratz.

"Are there any more coming behind you?" he asked the trembling Jacob.

"No, my officer. We left a bare camp behind us."

"Then come on."

And away went the little column of hussars at a trot; which they kept up, mile after mile, till they saw lights before them, and McMorris called out:

"Is there any hussar knows this country? If so, let him ride up to me."

A man rode up, saluting, and said:

"The lights yonder must be the village of Sturm, my officer. The left of Count Loban's line was to rest there, as they told me on his patrol only yesterday."

"Very good. Walk your horses! O'Donohue, go ahead with two men, and be careful if any of the enemy are round."

O'Donohue trotted off with two men, and the little troop proceeded several miles further, when they were startled by several dropping shots in front, and O'Donohue came back at a gallop, shouting:

"The enemy are advancing. I ran into their scouts, lieutenant."

"Did they run?" asked McMorris anxiously.

"Yes, your honor, there were only two of them, and it's my belief we surprised them."

"Hussars, ride into the bushes and line the road!" cried McMorris, and the well-disciplined troopers obeyed like machines.

Five minutes later, they sat on their horses, hidden among the bushes, carbine on thigh, waiting the advance of the enemy.

They had not long to wait.

Presently they heard the sound of horses coming at a trot, and four men dashed by, with their carbines ready for use, outlined against the stars in the dark sky.

The Prussian hussars sat like equestrian statues, waiting for orders, and the four scouts rode by, not seeing them.

Then came a louder clatter of hoofs, and they heard the voice of an officer shouting:

"Close up there! 'Tis only a few rascals of pandours, after all. Men, I'm ashamed of you."

There was no mistaking the voice of McMahon, and McMorris shouted in Irish:

"Where are you going, son of Tipperary?"

"Halt!" bellowed McMahon. "By the piper that played before Moses, 'tis Maurice McMorris. Oh, White Maurice, me darlin', me heart's been bleedin' for ye, so it has. We heard ye were all cut to pieces by Nadasti, and the castle taken. Ohouel! Ohouel! And are ye kilt, me boy, and where are ye anyway?"

McMorris rode out, and the warm-hearted son of Tipperary hugged him closely, ejaculating:

"Holy Moses, we're all right now, so we are. The four Maurices have found each other, and old Ziehen's behind us, and bedad, av we don't bate old Nadasti out of his boots before many days me name's not Maurice McMahon. Come on, and I'll tell ye all about it. Trenck's safe in jail, the baste, and our fortune's makin' itself as fast as it can, bedad."

CHAPTER XXII.

ZIEHEN.

THE two troops of hussars, thus reunited, rode on peacefully together, returning on the track on which McMorris had just come.

The two friends rode in front while McMahon related his adventures, and told how he came to be where he was.

"I took that baste of a Trenck with me," he said, "intending to turn him over to Count Loban's post, to go back to Gratz, when Black Maurice, who was out spying in advance, tould me he thought there was fightin' goin' on somewhere near us. Ye may think it made me nervous enough, with that devil to guard, and knowin' what would be the consequences if he got off. So I took to the woods and bid my party till O'Donovan came back from a little ride he took."

"Did you send him alone?"

"Of coarse. Why'd I be sendin' two when one would answer the purpose! All I wanted was a report, and O'Donovan's eyes can't be beat."

"And what did he find out?"

"Bedad, that the enemy were advancing in force, and that our fellows were coming up from Gratz like hounds after a fox. So I saw that 'twas no use trying to cut me way to Gratz, when our people were leaving it, and the last thing I could do was to find a good place to bide, and hold on by the eyelids, as the sailors say, till our men came along."

"And where did you go?"

"Into the woods, where we found a hollow, and went into camp. Then I left Trenck to Black Maurice and another man, and took the rest on a scout to find the regiment."

"Did you find them?"

"I did that. Man, dear, the country's up and coming our way and we didn't know a thing of it all."

"Why, what has happened?"

"The Austrians bate the king at Kolin, for one thing certain."

"Beat him! beat our Fritz! Impossible!"

"So I said; but it seems he tried to attack them, when they were two to one and all bid behind works, and they just slaughtered the poor boys."

"Heavens! that's bad news."

"But that's not all!"

"What more?"

"Old Fritz is hard to beat, and he got together all the men he had left and started off for Hanover, where the French were coming on."

"What? Leaving the Austrians behind him?"

"So it seems. And they were too busy taking Silesia to notice the king. And off he went to meet the French, with only twenty thousand men in all."

"And what then?" asked Maurice anxiously.

didn't have a hussar on the field. Oh, the boys 'll never get over it. The Guards 'll be puttin' on such airs we'll have to fight every man Jack of 'em, before they'll let us live for their sneers."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, it seems that Seidlitz was there, with all the heavy cavalry and the Guards, and 'twas they did the business."

"But why didn't we know of this sooner?"

"Devil a one of me knows, White Maurice, but the officer only got to Gratz with the news of the battle, yesterday; and it's frightened the old Austrians, so they're getting all their men together at Newmarket, and that's where we're all going now, my boy. Bedad they don't chate the Hussars out of this foight."

"But what has happened? How do you know all this, Maurice?"

"Didn't I tell ye I found the regiment?"

"Yes."

"Well, 'twas ther I heard it. Ziethen has left Gratz, and is gathering up all his cavalry, while the country people tell me the Austrians are ahead of us. Did ye hear any guns to-day?"

"Certainly. They attacked us at Konigstein and we beat them off and took old Trenck prisoner."

McMahon jumped half out of his saddle.

"Ye took old Trenck?"

"Certainly. We have him locked up in the castle now, under guard. What are you doing?"

McMahon seemed too bewildered to answer.

"Ye say ye've taken old Trenck a prisoner?"

"Yes, yes, I say."

"Maurice McMorris, ye're a desavin' young pairson, so y're. I thought ye didn't know anything of soldiering, and bedad ye can bate me already. Is it what am I doin'? Sure I'm on the advance."

"Advance of what?"

"All we've got left," said McMahon with a sigh. "It's not much. Ziethen has a division of about six thousand hussars. I'm told, with thirty guns and mounted cannoneers. He was tickled to death to see young Trenck, and sent him to Gratz at once, under guard; while he gave me the honor of the advance to-night. Have ye seen any Austrians, White Maurice?"

"To be sure I have, Red Maurice. I rode by a column of three big brigades, not two hours ago, and four more have joined them ere this. There's twenty thousand of the enemy's horse between us and the king."

"Are ye sure, White Maurice?" asked McMahon gravely. "It won't do to be mistaken ye know."

"So sure that I have one of their men in our hands a prisoner, and you can question him if you doubt the information."

"Then we'll have to report to the general and let him know."

"Where is the general?"

"Less than a mile behind. The ould fox is always next to the advance."

McMahon hesitated a moment, and then said, as if he had to struggle with some inward feeling of envy:

"White Maurice, I thought 'twas bad luck when ye got your commission dated a day before mine; but, on my word you're worthy of leading. You've done what many an older officer would not have dared to do. Will ye go back and report, or will ye lead the advance all night?"

"I'll keep in advance. You take in the report. The general knows you better than me."

"But let me tell ye something, White Maurice. The man that brings the news will have a good chance of being mentioned in orders."

"So much the better. I wish you the luck."

McMahon laid his hand on the other's shoulder.

"White Maurice, ye've no more selfishness than a woman; but it sha'n't hurt ye. Where's this prisoner, and I'll go back myself."

McMorris called up Jacob Dietz, who seemed to have become quite reconciled to his fate now, and was conversing amicably with the hussars, to whom he represented himself as anxious to enlist in the Prussian army.

McMahon rode off with the easily-turned Jacob, and after a quarter of an hour's ride, was halted by four men coming along in the road with carbines advanced, in marked contrast to the careless way in which McMorris had seen the Austrians moving.

Ziethen, in his own country, had scouts and flankers out on every road, while Nadasti, in the enemy's lines, marched in solid column, and seemed to be careless of any enemy coming near him.

The Irish hussar was taken back to old Ziethen, who was coming along the road, and the veteran cross-examined the virtuous Jacob to his own satisfaction, as they rode on, when he called out to McMahon:

"Come here, lieutenant."

McMahon rode up beside him.

"This man tells me that the Austrians are between us and the king."

"Yes, general."

"How is it you have not run on them?"

"Because they are still too far off."

"Who is the officer this man tells me took him prisoner, close to his own column?"

"My comrade, Lieutenant McMorris."

"Aba! it is you four again; always you four. Do you know, monsieur, this capture was a very valuable one!"

"Yes, general."

"It may lead to our beating the Austrians."

"I hope so, general."

"I wish I knew where Trenck was," muttered the old general. "He's the only one that bothers me now, for he's an active fellow."

"Trenck is a prisoner, general."

"No, no. I mean old Trenck."

"He too is a prisoner, sir."

"Where?"

The question was curt and gruff, as if the old hussar did not believe the news.

"In the castle of Konigstein. My friend McMorris took him to-day, after the rout at the Devil's Gully, of which I told you, sir."

The general rode on for nearly a minute, as if lost in thought, and then ejaculated:

"By heavens, these four madmen are worth all the rest of my officers. Send for McMorris at once."

McMahon bowed, unable to conceal his delight, and dashed off down the road full speed to McMorris, to whom he said abruptly:

"The general wants to see ye at once. I'll keep the advance. How long before we run into them, think ye?"

"Impossible to say. They marched at a good round pace, and we shall not overtake them before daylight, unless they go into camp."

Then McMorris rode back to the general, and McMahon continued his advance.

The younger officer reached the old general and reported himself, being received with the gruff salutation:

"Well, sir, and they tell me you've taken the old pandour fox at last?"

"Yes, general."

"Where is he?"

"In the castle of Konigstein, about a mile beyond this. Do you wish to see him, general?"

"No, sir, no. Is he in safe hands?"

"There are just three men to guard the castle, general, and they need help."

"They shall have it. I will drop a garrison there. Did you see the Austrian cavalry, sir?"

"Yes, general. I passed them in the dark, and they are said to have five brigades. I saw four."

"How far ahead are they?"

"About five miles I judge, if they are still marching, general."

"What is your name, sir?"

"McMorris, of your own regiment, general."

"I remember, sir. Hark ye. You and your friends are all mad they say; so I'm going to send you on a mad expedition. Are your horses good?"

"Pretty fair, general."

"That will not do. See here: you shall have my spare horse. He is fresh."

"Thank you, general," said McMorris wonderingly; but Ziethen went on:

"It is essential I should send word to the king that I am compelled to take a circuit to avoid the enemy. I cannot trust to dispatches, so I must send by word of mouth. Can you four, think you, pass the Austrian lines and reach the king to-morrow? His majesty is at Newmarket near the village of Lissa."

"I think we can try, general."

"Very well. Now listen. Tell your friend and your two orderlies the message; so that, if one be killed, the others can repeat it. If you are all taken or killed, it cannot be helped."

"Very good, general."

"You will have my spare horse, and I will send an officer to you in the advance with three others. When you are ready, you must dash across country the best you know how. If you all reach the king and we win the next battle, I will see you are all promoted."

"Thank you, general."

"Now for your message. Is your memory good?"

"Yes, general."

"Say to his majesty that the officer sent to tell me of the defeat of Kolin never reached me, and the first that I heard of it was when the dispatch to announce the victory of Rossbach came."

"Yes, general."

"Tell him further that I have six thousand good hussars, who are now able to beat double their number of cuirassiers, on account of the big horses being worn out with picket duty."

"Yes, general," said McMorris soberly.

"Tell him that, particularly, for I know that he doesn't believe it."

"I'll remember, general."

"Tell him I am following the Austrian Loudon with all his cavalry, and that he may expect me to attack the enemy in rear, as soon as he has engaged them at Lissa."

"I will tell him, general."

"That's all, sir. Get your horse, and God speed you."

Then the gruff old general turned to a staff officer and gave the necessary orders.

Ten minutes later McMorris, McMahon, O'Donohue and O'Donovan, mounted on fresh

vigorous horses, whose smooth motion was a welcome change from that of their own rather tired animals, rode to the head of the advance, after turning over the command to a Prussian officer, and desirced, far ahead, the twinkling lights of innumerable fires, telling that the Austrians had gone into camp.

They rode on, passing the Devil's Gully where it ran into the high-road and were soon able to make out the position of the enemy by the line officers.

"White Maurice," said McMahon, "where's the king, I wonder?"

"At Newmarket in Silesia."

"It's thirty miles away, d'ye know?"

"I believe so, and the Austrian army lies between us and the king."

"How'll we get there?"

"Indeed, I don't know. Red Maurice. Let's hold a council of war. Four heads are better than one."

They stopped to consult, and McMorris explained matters to his friends—for O'Donovan and O'Donohue were treated like friends when they were alone—and concluded:

"Now give me your opinions. The king lies on the further side of those fires thirty miles off. Shall we go through the Austrians, or 'round them?"

There was a long silence, and McMahon said in the dryest of tones:

"Devil a choice is there anyway! If we try to go round, 'twill be sixty miles, and we'll never do it. If we try to go through, we'll never do that neither."

"What do you think, O'Donohue?"

"Faith, liftin', I say go through the basties. They'll never drame we'd dare do it."

"And you, O'Donovan?"

"I think, if four start, liftin', may be one will get through, and that's enough."

McMahon gave a cry of surprise:

"Bedad, ye're both crazy, so ye are."

"And haven't we got the title of the four mad hussars?" asked McMorris. "We may as well deserve it, and take the chances. Remember, if we get through, we'll all be promoted. That's worth some risk; isn't it?"

McMahon shrugged his shoulders.

"Some risk! I should say so. Well, go on. I'm with ye boys. How'll ye go, White Maurice?"

"I propose to walk the horses as far as their vedettes, and try to slip through unseen. If we do, half the task is over. I've seen how careless they are, and our uniforms are like theirs."

"But suppose we're hailed?"

"If they hail in German, answer in Irish and they'll take it for Hungarian."

"But suppose they're Hungarians?"

"Answer in German or French. That is our risk. We shall have to run for it, anyway."

"Ye may say that. Well, we're all ready."

"Then forward. Stay, do you all know the message for his majesty? If you do, repeat it."

The three Irishmen repeated the message, and McMorris said:

"Correct. Now forward in God's name."

They rode on, and there was something in the desperate nature of the service on which they were going that chilled their spirits, and slowly induced silence even to the usually volatile and noisy McMahon.

As they walked their horses steadily forward, the fires became more and more distinct, till they could make out dark figures moving to and fro, and see that the regiments, instead of going into a regular camp, with pickets out, had massed in the fields to cook soup for their supper. McMahon observed as he gazed:

"They're going to move off again. If we wait, we can mix up with their column and head them. It's better than running the gauntlet."

McMorris looked at them long and closely.

"I think you're wrong," he said. "They are only careless. That is all. They know their numbers, and confide in them. Let us advance."

He went directly on down the road, till he could see the faces of the soldiers plainly, and still no challenge came, till a man rode out from the shelter of some trees, not a hundred yards from the nearest fire, and called out:

"Halt! Who goes there?"

"Officers with dispatches for General Loudon," said McMorris boldly. "Where are the general's quarters, my man?"

The vedette hesitated.

"Where do you come from?" he asked.

"From Marshal Dann, of course, where else? Come, come, we're in a hurry. Where are the general's quarters, I say?"

"I don't know," was the sullen answer.

"You'll find them somewhere among the fires."

dreaming who they were, till they had actually reached the very middle of the camp, and could see the dark country beyond them. And then they heard the trot of horses coming to meet them, and saw a general officer with his staff in the light of the fires, who rode straight up and called out:

"Who are you? Is it dispatches? I am General Loudon."

CHAPTER XXIII. THE KING'S BIVOUAC.

THE Prussian army, less than forty thousand strong, lay at the village of Neumark or Newmarket, while the Austrians, under Prince Charles of Lorraine, with three times as many men, were encamped, less than five miles off, at the soon-to-be famous village of Leuthen or Lissa.

Yet in spite of the disparity of numbers, the Prussian soldiers were cracking jokes round their fires, smoking pipes, singing songs and telling stories about Rossbach, where they had beaten the French so handsomely, a few weeks before.

The dragoons of the Guard lay next to the tall regiment of grenadiers, and the officers of both corps were fraternizing over the same rather scanty supply of soup, made out of the proceeds of the only hen-roost they had been able to find unrobbed by the Austrians.

"Confound the pandours!" growled Major Bally Carroll or Balikaro, as he sipped at his pannikin, "they're worse than our own Hussars for stealing."

"And that's all Hussars are good for," said Baron Kapp in a sneering tone. "Come, major, you must admit now that your mad friends of whom you expected such great things, have not done much, this war! What's become of Zieten, for example?"

"Zieten will turn up, never fear," said the big major confidently. "It is true the Hussars have not done much yet, baron, but they've had no chance. His Majesty has kept them on patrol duty in Bohemia."

"And well they've done it," said Kapp in the same scornful way. "The fact is, they're only fit to look at the enemy and run away."

Balikaro laughed.

"You will have your joke, baron. To be sure, it's little running away any of us could do now. I doubt if our horses could get up a trot, they're so thin and tired out."

"Doing picket duty!" growled Kapp, "when the Hussars ought to be here, to give us a rest. We'll have one consolation—they won't be able to look us in the face when we go back to Berlin!"

"We're not at Berlin yet, baron, and it may be a long day before we see it again. You'll see the time yet when you'll be glad to know the Hussars are coming."

"But where are they now?" asked Kapp, in a tone of impatience. "We want every man we can scrape up; and here we are, with less than three thousand cuirassiers nearly worn out, and the lazy Hussars nowhere near."

The good major was about to reply rather warmly in defense of the Hussars, when a warning cough from several officers told him that some one was coming to the fire.

Soon after, the slender, shrunken form of the king, looking prematurely aged by the work of the campaign, was seen to approach the fire; and all the officers rose and remained standing, bat in hand.

"Be covered, gentlemen," said Frederick, briskly, but with an evident effort. "Major Balikaro, how are the horses in your regiment to-night?"

"Fit for work to-morrow, sire, unless—"

"Unless what?—unless what, sire?"

"Unless the enemy runs away, sire. We'll not be able to follow far, I'm thinking."

"Hum! Any shoes off?"

"That is a thing that can never happen in your majesty's Guards, so long as its officers are attentive to duty."

"Are they all so, sir?"

"I can answer for my own regiment, sire."

"Hum!"

The king seemed thoughtful—as well he might, in view of the odds against him. Presently he said:

"I shall require double duty of you to-morrow. If your horses fail, you must capture some from the Austrians. Coax them to charge you, major. I must have horses for a long pursuit. I am going to beat those fellows!"

"We all know that, sire. We will do our best; but your majesty will remember we are not Hussars."

The king frowned.

"You admire the Hussars! For my part, I am wondering if I ever had any."

Baron Kapp nudged the major, and asked, in an innocent way:

"Has your majesty then heard no news of the General Zieten?"

Frederick favored him with a cold stare.

"Baron, if you wish a position on my staff, say so; but don't ask questions that are an impertinence in a fine officer."

The baron colored deeply and fell back, but the kind-hearted major interposed:

"The baron is anxious, as we all are, sire, to see the Hussars. We were discussing them as you came to us."

"Well, sir, and what did you—hark! what is that? Wasn't that a shot at the outposts?"

They listened intently, but no one had heard it but the king.

All was silent in the army, save a low buzz of distant conversation and the occasional snort of a horse.

Still the king listened intently, and again said:

"I was sure of it. Another—and a volley! Major Balikaro, are the horses saddled?"

The major listened a moment before he replied; for the king had not been mistaken. Distant dropping shots were audible.

"The horses are saddled, sire," he answered; "but, if you will allow me—"

"Well, sir, well!—what?"

"Those shots are not at our outposts. They are too distant. They come from the main body of the Austrians."

The king held up his hand.

"Silence all! Listen!"

Again came the dropping shots, followed by a rolling volley that sounded like a bundle of fire-crackers.

Then came a distant cheer, and all was quiet again, save the low buzz of the army.

The soldiers had heard the firing, and were talking about it in low tones, but the face of the king wore a haggard, anxious look, as he muttered:

"If it were only morning!"

He remained brooding by the fire for some time longer, when every one was startled to hear another shot, this time unmistakably coming from the outposts.

In a moment every officer was striding toward his horse, as if by an instinct, when the king said:

"It is nothing, gentlemen. If it were an attack we should hear a volley."

Then his face seemed to clear up as if by magic, and he continued gayly:

"Gentlemen, something tells me the Hussars are near. Zieten has not failed us. That firing came from him. Hark! here comes some one!"

At this moment a rousing cheer came up from the army in the direction whence the shots had been heard, and presently four hussars rode in among the fires, their leader shouting:

"The king! the king! Where is his majesty?"

A hundred voices directed them, and the king himself, his countenance serene and placid, stood quietly by the fire, while several officers ran out to lead the hussars up.

And up they came presently, four tall, slim young men, of whom two were officers and two simple soldiers.

Their horses were reeking with sweat, and looked blown and fatigued, while the faces of the riders were black with powder, and one had his head bound up, without a shako.

The king said not a word till they had dismounted before him, when the leader took off his shako and bowed low, saying:

"I have the honor to report, sire. Lieutenant McMorris, of Zieten's Hussars, with Lieutenant McMahon, and our orderlies."

"Whence come you?" asked the king, coldly.

"From General Zieten, sire."

"Where is he?"

"On the other side the Austrians, sire."

"Was the firing I heard his attack?"

"No, sire. They fired at us as we ran the gauntlet to get to your majesty."

"You mean that you came through the midst of the Austrian army?" asked the king, as if he were incredulous.

"It was our only way, sire. General Zieten told us to ride to you, thirty miles in a straight line, and we did so."

"And is he thirty miles off?" asked the king, with a frown.

"Not now, sire. He will be in rear of the Austrians before morning, and bids me say to your majesty that one hussar will beat two cuirassiers at the end of a campaign, when the horses are tired."

The king burst out laughing.

"There spoke old Zieten, certainly."

Then turning to the officers round:

"Well, gentlemen, what do you think of my hussars now? Would any of you have dared to ride through the Austrian army?"

Even Baron Kapp was conquered at last.

"It is magnificent, sire," he cried. "Such a madfeat I never heard of before."

The king smiled.

"You don't know the gentlemen as I do. These are my Mad Hussars, who leaped the bridge. By heavens, gentlemen, I believe that if I told them to ride back to Zieten to-night they would do it without a murmur."

"Pardon me, sire," interposed McMorris, "but not without four fresh horses. In the morning, after a good feed, we might do it with these."

"I told you so, gentlemen. Now, how many men have the chivvy yonder?"

"About ninety thousand, sire; but they have nearly twenty thousand cavalry in bivouac, about thirty miles away, under Loudon."

"And did you, by chance, ride through them?" the king asked, jestingly.

"We did, sire; and no one stopped us till we met General Loudon himself."

The king clapped his hands in surprise.

"Better and better! Mad Hussars that you are, do you want me to make you all captains that you tell me this?"

McMahon, whose head was bandaged up, here saluted respectfully and said, in a very insinuating manner:

"If your majesty would do it we should consider it a favor; but White Maurice here is fit to be a major, at least."

Balikaro uttered a low chuckle.

"Holy St. Patrick, listen to the Tipperary tongue of him! A bit of a gossoon like that!"

The king heard him, and turned.

"Come, Balikaro" he said, "they are your countrymen; shall I grant their request?"

"No, sire," said the bluff major, shortly.

"Why not?"

"Because the two peasants are not fit for it yet. Make 'em cornets, and give them each a flag to carry, and they'll take it where few men would dare follow."

"It shall be done," said the king. "Tell my adjutant their names, after the battle, and I'll see it is done. But the officers—what of them?"

"I'd not presume to dictate to ye, sire, but I'd remark that I've long had a liking for the light cavalry; and if your majesty would give me a regiment of Hussars, with the two boys here for lieutenant-colonel and major, I think we'd make a reputation for the regiment."

The king took a pinch of snuff, and rubbed his nose thoughtfully before he spoke. Then he turned to McMorris:

"How would such an arrangement suit you two madmen, I wonder?"

"We would endeavor to make the enemy know when the Mad Hussars were coming, sire. I had forgotten to report one thing, your majesty—"

"And what is that?"

"That Baron Franz Trenck is a prisoner in your majesty's fortress of Konigstein."

"Who took him, sire?"

McMorris was silent, but McMahon answered:

"Lieutenant McMorris, your majesty, while I was away on patrol duty."

The king looked at him keenly.

"In what direction?"

"Toward Gratz, sire."

"What was he doing near you?"

"Trying to take the castle, sire."

"Was that all?"

"All but the mistake he made, sire. He had an idea he could take White Maurice here, and White Maurice took him."

The king stood looking thoughtfully at the ground for several minutes, while the hussars watched him a little anxiously.

It seemed to McMorris as if something was hidden under the king's demeanor; and presently his conjecture was verified, when Frederick abruptly raised his head, saying:

"Fall back out of bearing, gentlemen; I wish to speak to Major McMorris."

The officers bowed low and obeyed, when the king said, in a low voice:

"Franz Trenck came after his nephew; is it not so, sire?"

McMorris remained silent.

"Why do you not answer, sir?" asked Frederick, imperiously.

"Because I am not at liberty, sire."

"Indeed! Why not?"

"Because the honor of other persons is concerned in the affair, sire."

"Indeed! A lady, perhaps?"

McMorris made no answer, and the king's face grew dark as night as he tapped his snuff-box, impatiently repeating:

"Is there a lady in the case?"

"If there be, your majesty must know that a gentleman can not answer the question."

"True, true. I apologize. You are right. Tell me, sir, if you know where is Baron Trenck the younger."

"In Gratz, sir."

"Are you certain?"

"I am, sire."

The king heaved a sigh of relief.

"Colonel McMorris," he said, "you will be attached to my own person to-morrow, with Major McMahon, and your friends. We shall have a desperate battle, and I shall need to go close to the enemy to see the working of my men. If we all survive, I shall grant the request of your old friend, Carroll. Good-night, sir. See that your horses are cared for well. We shall need them to-morrow."

He raised his hat slightly, and walked away, in his nervous, absent manner, humming a tune to himself, the officers parting right and left, before his air of abstraction.

When he had vanished McMahon rushed up to his friend and inquired anxiously:

"Does he know?"

"No. He suspects, but he does not desire to know."

"Ah, he's a soldier and a man, every inch of him," said McMahon enthusiastically. "I'll go bail he knows all about it, and won't say a word."

"Then we must be equally discreet. We are to have that regiment, by the by."

"With Jack Carroll for colonel?"

"Yes."

"Hurroo! D'ye hear that, Jack? We're to have the regimint, he says."

Major Carroll made a grimace.

"Devil resave the regimint some of us will be wantin' to-morrow night. Be quiet, ye wild gossoon, and be saying your prayers and feedin' your horse. We'll want all be's got in him before we get through with them Austrians."

And the worthy major went off to attend to his own charger, too stoical to let a sign escape him of the intense gratification he really felt.

But, when the first streak of light dawned in the east, and the slumbering soldiers began to roll over by their fires and rouse up for the day's work before them, Jack Carroll said to McMahon, who had shared his blanket for the night:

"Maurice, me darling, don't ye go off on any of your mad hunts to-day, you and the other three Maurices. I'll want ye all in my regimint, and I'm going to pass it in review before the king at Berlin, before I die. D'ye mind that, now?"

"Of course ye will, and may be I'll have one, too," quoth McMahon, dryly.

"Ye'll have no such thing, ye presuming gossoon. Is it the likes of you's going to set up beside me when I was a cornet years before ye were even a cadet?"

"You'll be a general then, Jack."

Carroll could not resist a smile at the flattery, just as the first gun pealed out. Then he shook his head, wisely observing:

"We're in a vale of tears, McMorris. Who knows but we'll be all cold and stiff to-night, and the regimint gone, too."

McMahon only laughed at the idea. The wild Irishman had a belief in his luck.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE FOUR MAURICES IN BERLIN.

THE city of Berlin, so full of life and gayety at the commencement of the Seven Years' War, had a gloomy and deserted look at the end of this, its second year.

The brilliant inauguration, in which the audacious Frederick had taken Saxony and most of Bohemia by surprise, had been succeeded by a year of reverses, as one after another of the king's foes had brought tremendous forces to bear on his comparative handful.

The Prussian army, which had opened the war, two hundred thousand strong, had lost heavily in its career of conquest, by battle and in occupying captured fortresses.

The king had been beaten at Kolin, after a fearful struggle; the Austrians had retaken Bohemia; the French had invaded Hanover, and the victory of Rossbach at one end of Prussia had only been obtained at the cost of Silesia, overrun by the Austrians at the other extremity of Frederick's territories.

The people of Berlin had not dared to rejoice much over Rossbach, for fear of another Kolin, and exaggerated rumors of the size of the Austrian army, said to be advancing on the city, kept the people in a state of gloom and apprehension!

The queen mother had died—it was said of grief at the reverse of Kolin—and people were expecting daily to hear news of the advance of the Austrians.

The Princess Amelia, the virtual mistress at court, now that her mother had gone, was gloomy and irritable, and the court was in mourning for the queen mother, while the queen regnant, Elizabeth Christine, a mere cipher, passed her time in praying and weeping for the king, while Princess Amelia made bitter sarcasms on everybody and everything.

It was in the midst of all this gloom, that a courier arrived from the front, announcing that the Austrian Army had quite overrun Silesia, and were advancing on Berlin, with their extreme advance within three days' march, while the king, with an army one-third the size of that of the enemy, was hastening by forced marches to intercept them.

Berlin fell into confusion at once, and the Princess Amelia, who had lately returned from a visit to her chateau of Schaffhausen, gave orders that her household should be prepared to flee at a moment's notice.

And when the princess, who was noted for her energetic character, talked of flight, it was supposed that the timid and devotional queen would be sure to follow.

To the surprise of all, her majesty did no such thing.

On the contrary, for the first time in her history, she asserted her rights as queen, and issued a public order that a court festival would be held in two days, to celebrate the victory of Rossbach, and terminate the period of mourning. And she laid her commands on the Princess Amelia to be present at that festival.

The order was printed in the court journal, and became the talk of Berlin, while the ladies

of the court instantly divided into two parties, and discussed the question—to go, or not to go—with much acrimony.

Count Pollmeyer, chamberlain to the princess, brought her the order, and expected to receive a scolding for his pains.

To his surprise, the princess read it without a word, and merely bowed her head, in token of compliance.

Pollmeyer waited and fidgeted, till at last he said insinuatingly:

"Then your highness's orders are to be countermanded?"

"Of course they are, sir," she replied coldly. "The queen represents his majesty, and when the king issues an order, his subjects obey."

The count bowed low, and the princess added with cutting irony:

"I see you still wear your arm in a sling, count, yet I saw you carv a fowl yesterday. Are you still too weak to mount a horse?"

The count flushed crimson. As a matter of fact, the atmosphere of Berlin was too pleasant to him, after the campaign in which he had been wounded, a year before, to make him anxious to return to the front and its hardships, and he had been so much accustomed to hear the princess railing against the war that he had grown to believe she wished him to remain in her service.

"I—I don't understand your highness," he said.

The princess smiled in her gloomy sarcastic way, which had grown on her of late.

"I mean that, if the state is in such danger, she needs the services of every man who can ride a horse and give an order, even if he cannot wield a dragoon's sword."

The count bowed low.

"I understand your highness now. I will offer my resignation at once."

"It will be accepted, sir," she said coldly.

Then, as the mortified count left the room, she murmured to herself:

"And it needed her, whom I have despised, to teach me my duty to Prussia. I must cease to be a woman. Kings and princesses should be machines, without sex."

The struggle between the woman who loved the handsome rascal, Trenck, and the princess, with a duty to her country, had been a long one with her, and there was no telling how it might have ended but for the seemingly overwhelming peril to the country that had come on them within the past few days.

The Princess Amelia paid a formal visit to the queen that afternoon, and seemed to have cast off her gloom for the time, determined to show a bold front to the enemy, while her ladies—the Countesses Bertha and Hildegarde—vied with each other in infusing merriment into the court.

Yet it could be seen, as the preparations went on for the festival, that the rejoicing was very hollow, and that fear underlay every smile. It was winter time, and flowers were scarce, so they had to substitute evergreens by day and illuminations by night for the garlands which should have decorated the windows.

When the day of the festival dawned, it became evident that it was to be intensely raw and disagreeable; so that the procession would have but a sorry time of it.

But, spite of the weather and bad news on all sides, the Berliners had made up their minds to be merry outside if not inside, and they shouted for Rossbach and the king, drank beer at Domenico's, and tried to make themselves believe that everything was all right, even while they dreaded to look out on the Silesian road, for fear of seeing a fresh courier with news that the king was killed or a prisoner.

The day passed by and the evening came, when the queen had announced a court banquet.

No courier had arrived all day, and, in the absence of news, rumors became thick that the enemy had cut off communications with the city, and that the next thing to be heard would be the Austrian guns beyond the Spree.

Still the queen remained calm, and the banquet was opened in due form, while the Grand Chancellor made a speech, in drinking the health of the "victor of Rossbach" and wishing his majesty "many years in which to beat his foes."

It was then, while the merriment was being forced to its most unnatural pitch, that a sudden bush fell on all present, as a slight concussion shook the floor and made the chandeliers jingle. The ladies looked at each other and whispered:

"What's that?"

The few invalid officers present—there were very few of them now—even Pollmeyer had gone—exchanged meaning glances.

No one had heard any report, but they knew that such a concussion could only be caused by the explosion of a heavy gun or a magazine.

The band began to play at a sign from the Grand Chamberlain, and the conversation was renewed, but it was noticed that the ladies were very pale—all but the queen and princess—and that, one after the other the officers who were on duty in the palace guard slipped out of the room.

And every now and then in the midst of the music of the band, one might catch the jingle

of the glass lusters in the chandeliers and see the drops quivering as if at a fresh shock.

The queen kept up a smiling face and the Princess Amelia waved her fan with cold dignity, to keep up appearances, but the ladies began to whisper in each other's ears, and when the band stopped at last it became evident that every one was talking, for a loud buzz, before hidden by the strains of the horns, burst out at once, and then stopped as if every one were ashamed at being detected in talking.

The silence that ensued for several seconds was intense and the queen was just opening her lips in a painful smile to speak, when the unmistakable boom of a gun shook the chandeliers once more, followed by a distant shout that penetrated even to the banquet room of the palace.

Even the queen could control herself no longer, and it was in trembling tones that she said to the Grand Chamberlain:

"What is that for, Count Kalben?"

The old count looked puzzled.

"I will inquire, your majesty. Possibly it is a salute in honor of the day."

"But we had our salute this morning," an impetuous young lady called out, and then turned scarlet and tried to hide behind her companion, frightened at her own temerity.

The queen lifted her fan which fluttered like a leaf in the wind as she said:

"Oblige me by finding out, count."

The Grand Chamberlain bowed and was backing out, when a loud cheer arose in the street under the very windows, followed by a confused mob of voices in the palace itself and the thunder of feet rushing up the broad staircase.

The Princess Amelia started up all of a sudden her eyes blazing, her face transfigured.

Her quick wit told her what had happened.

"To your feet, ladies," she cried, "the people are coming to announce a victory. Welcome them in the queen's name."

Then came a mighty roar outside the very door, as a wild mob of frantic people burst into the banqueting room, carrying on their shoulders four hussar officers who were waving their tall shakos and shouting with the rest till they saw the brilliant lights and the throng of brightly dressed ladies at the table.

Then, as the doors flew open, came a regular salvo of artillery, fifty guns going off at once, and the ladies jumped and stopped their ears, while the tremendous shock silenced every one for an instant.

And in that instant one of the hussars took advantage of the lull, with a promptitude that showed him to be a man of action.

He was supported by two burly brewers, and he sprung up with a foot on the shoulder of each, the two brewers understanding his intention, and helping him up.

"Your majesty," he shouted in a high, clear voice, "I have the honor to crave pardon for this sudden entrance, but these honest people have insisted on coming to show their loyalty. His majesty King Frederick the Great of Prussia commissions me to announce to you that he has totally defeated Prince Charles of Lorraine, with a loss of twenty thousand prisoners and all his artillery, at the village of Leuthen, and that the territory of Silesia is free from the invaders."

Then arose another roar, in which the high treble of women was plainly perceptible, as the lately trembling ladies waved their handkerchiefs, laughing and crying together, while the queen, completely overcome, sank back in her chair ready to faint.

"Let us down, you fools," growled McMahon as the shouting subsided. "We have to pay our respects to the ladies."

The enthusiasm of the crowd had worked itself hoarse at last, and the four hussars were permitted to descend, when they made their way to the platform, on which sat the queen and princess, where McMorris handed to her majesty, with a low bow, a letter, with a second to the Princess Amelia.

Then the silence of etiquette fell on the room, while the Grand Chamberlain, whose sense of decorum was outraged by the mob at the door, went out among them whispering energetically:

"Go out. Are you not ashamed to behave so before the queen? There, there, my good friends, this won't do. You've shouted enough. Now get out."

And the docile Berliners, having "blown off the steam," in slang phrase, in their first rush, shuffled obediently out, while the quiet of expectation reigned over the court as the queen eagerly read her letter.

Then she rose her face beaming and said:

"Ladies, I have the pleasure to announce that his majesty is victorious, and to present to you in his name, Lieutenant Colonel McMorris, Major McMahon, and Lieutenants O'Donovan and O'Donohue of the Fifth Hussars, who have brought us the good tidings. Be good to them for my sake and show them how Berlin ladies reward heroes. The Princess Amelia has an announcement to make to you."

The princess rose in her turn to say:

"His majesty desires me to announce to the court that Count Pollmeyer of the Guards, who

has been my chamberlain for a year past, is recalled to his regiment and his majesty in view of the uncertainty of the present war declares that the count's betrothal to the Countess Hildegarde von Brunnen is, at the request of both parties, dissolved."

McMahon, who was listening could not repress a start, and the keen-sighted princess observed sarcastically to him, amid the buzz of conversation that ensued:

"How is it, monsieur? You seem to have an interest in his majesty's letter. Do you by chance, know the parties?"

The hussar colored deeply as he answered:

"It is not for me to remind your highness that I have met the Countess Hildegarde, for the occasion was one that I am bound in honor to bury in oblivion."

She flashed a glance over his tall figure and for the first time recognized in him the companion of McMorris at Schafhausen. But her coolness never forsook her, used as she was to the glare of court publicity. Her voice was softer in tone, however, as she answered him:

"You are quite right, monsieur. I never saw you before; but, as the honored messenger of my brother, I am bound to present you to my ladies."

Then turning to Hildegarde, she said quietly: "Countess, allow me to present Major McMahon, whom I intrust to your care for the rest of the evening."

The young countess colored slightly, but immediately made room for McMahon beside her, while Countess Bertha said in a pettish way to the princess:

"I suppose your highness thinks Hildegarde is the only person capable of entertaining a king's messenger?"

The princess lifted her eyebrows.

"And are you, too, ambitious? Nay, then, I suppose I shall have to console you for losing a sister-in-law by giving you a chance to secure a champion of your own."

McMorris, who had been conversing with the queen, at this moment fell back with a low bow and the princess touched his arm, observing gayly:

"Monsieur, you are a colonel they tell me?"

"One step lower, your highness."

"It is all one. We are to have a ball after the banquet and you will need a lady to take care of you. Countess Bertha Pollmeyer will oblige me by keeping you in order for this evening, and it will be your own fault if she gets tired of the task."

Then she turned and whispered to the queen, who smiled and nodded.

O'Donovan and O'Donohue, very red and bashful in their new uniforms and dignity stood a few steps off, not knowing what to do with themselves though more than one lady was smiling at the two handsome fellows with all her might.

The queen rose up with the princess saying:

"Ladies, we will adjourn to the ball-room, and in order to do proper honor to his majesty's officers the two gentlemen who are lowest in rank will accompany us."

And before the astonished hussars could quite realize what had happened the Queen of Prussia had taken O'Donovan's arm, while Amelia had performed a like office for O'Donohue, when they headed the procession to the ball-room as the band struck up a march.

There let us leave them for the present; for surely our Mad Hussars have come to enough luck for the luckiest of men.

The four Maurices who had met on the banks of the Dutch canal two years before as simple soldiers of fortune, with no bond of union but that of hailing from the same land that all four loved so dearly, had risen from nothing to the society of queens and princesses by the simple process of sticking together.

They had met to fight each other; they remained to fight the rest of the world, and they won the battle.

Ulster, Leinster, Munster, and Connaught, Protestant and Catholic, after breaking each other's heads at the beginning, joined forces at the end to conquer their fortune, and did it.

Irishmen of to-day, when peasant and peer are united in the bond that joined the four Maurices, the rest of the world can do them no harm; and the tie that unites brave men who have tested each other's courage, can never be broken.

Ulster, Leinster, Munster, and Connaught join hands, and long life to the O's and the Macs.

THE END.

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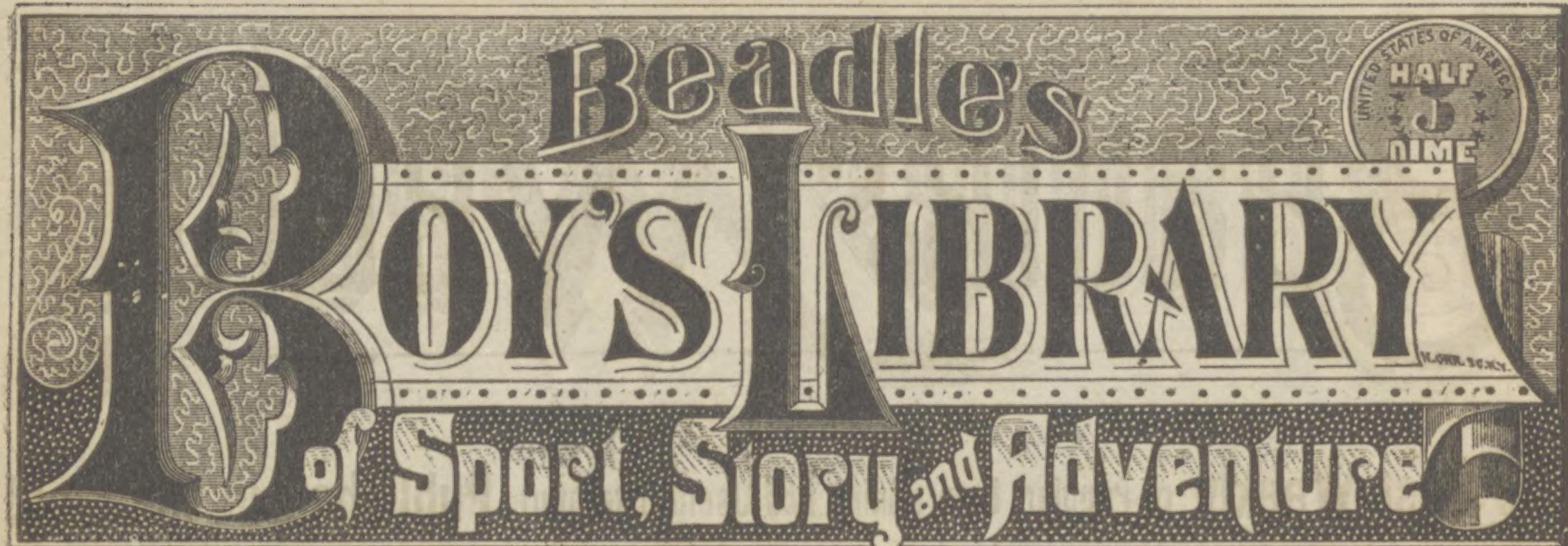
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